

Vasilije B. Sujic

R A J K O **T O D O R O V I C**



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# IMPRESSUM

Vasilije B. Sujic

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## Library

CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL HERITAGE

## Translation into English

Peter Stonelake

Darja Marija Vuletic

## Edition

Fine Arts / Vol. 1.

## Photography

Vojo Radonjic

## Publisher

NOVA POBJEDA DOO, Podgorica

NVO CEHRA, Niksic

(Culture, Ecology, Human rights, Alliance)

Dusko Miljanic

Rastko Ciric

Nikola Radovic

family photo documentation

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DPC, Podgorica

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## Circulation

500

Realisation of this book are supported by: The Government of Montenegro and Ministry of Culture of Montenegro.

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Drawing, comb. technique, 30x45cm, 2006

# I INSTEAD OF AN INTRODUCTION

## My first meeting with Rajko Todorovic

As an art critic, I have avoided more intimate acquaintances with artists, since this limits one's expression of a personal, critical attitude. A monograph on an artist and his work is closely linked with an analytical observation of his oeuvre and an insight into the artist's personality. I do not agree with what some say, that "the artist himself is a work of art". Contrary to nature, art is everything that man has created, surpassing the requirements of time and mere survival; within that is also the sphere of visual arts and its principles. This also includes forms from the digital, post-painting period that are defined along with the strivings of the conventional and traditional poetics in classical technologies. Sometimes there occurs a mutual intertwining of different visual and technological interventions.

My first meeting with Rajko Todorovic was preceded by his telephone call, when he asked me whether I felt like writing a monograph on his artwork. I was quite surprised by this call since we had not at that time had the opportunity to meet. I mentioned this to him. He answered that he was acquainted with my work as an art critic and thought that I could successfully place his oeuvre in its appropriate time and place. Our telephone agreement was as follows: I would become better acquainted with his oeuvre while the potential writing of the monograph remained open until I saw his artwork for myself in his studio and collections.

In April 2008 I arrived in Podgorica for the opening of an exhibition of Todorovic's drawings. This was a good opportunity to begin my acquaintance with the artist. Besides relatives and friends, almost the complete art community of Podgorica and Montenegro was present at the opening in the Centre of Modern Art's gallery. While meeting the guests I had the opportunity to notice their relationship to the artist and sense his position in their reflections. I talked to Mladen Lompar, the poet and critic, and the author of the foreword for that exhibition.<sup>1</sup> Amongst that crowd which follows these sorts of openings I had a longer conversation with Olga Perovic, the doyenne of historical and artistic critical thought in Montenegro.<sup>2</sup> These two had written several times on Todorovic, and on this occasion they presented me their rough impressions, not only on Todorovic, but also on the complete current artistic setting of this milieu.

<sup>1</sup> I knew Mladen Lompar from the period of our Art History studies at the Faculty for Philosophy in Belgrade.

<sup>2</sup> I used to cross paths with Olga Perovic at meetings or assemblies of the Yugoslav section of the AICA.

I had spent two days negotiating over how to approach the monograph text and realised that before me I had an artist who had devoted a lot of time to painting, which had resulted in a huge number of paintings, drawings and watercolours. One can sense that he follows the art scene, reads, thinks and makes his own judgments about other artists, whether or not they belong to the contemporary scene or some past epoch. The overall impression and the truth would not be complete if I did not mention that he loves pub life with its long talks, unofficial discussions, advocating of certain poetics and personalities, followed by jokes and banter. Nowhere could an artist, and not just a visual artist, so easily open up, rise and fall, as in a pub or tavern. Nowadays this has all changed. The new generations do not feel the magic of the tavern and its stale air full of smoke through which thoughts and ideas fly fast. This is also missing in the places Todorovic used to visit during the years he spent in Belgrade, where he felt this magic and was attached to it: “Kolarac”, “Znak pitanja”, “Prolece”, “Plavi Jadran” and other cult places of the post-war artistic generations. No more is there this atmosphere soaked with various vapours and cigarette smoke<sup>3</sup>, and swollen with emotions full of creative inspirations. They do not exist any more, although those pubs, as places where nervousness ended and sincerity began, are present as buildings even nowadays. An atmosphere heated up in such a way could not be found anywhere else. In 1955 a similar statement was given by Grga Gamulin in his monograph on Marin Tartaglia<sup>4</sup>: “In certain periods there appears an irresistible desire for something new; between the *noisy bars*<sup>5</sup> and the silence of the studios, a new vision of the world comes into being, while forms are separated from their direct foundations and are isolated in other illustrious fields.”

That evening, in a tavern in Podgorica, where some of Todorovic’s friends had gathered, I felt the way this environment, unknown to me, was “breathing” and how it observed things. Indeed, it was only a superficial, external insight, but it was enough to perceive another, previously unknown, environment through a different prism. It is not an environment in which Lubarda or Milunovic live, but it is a place for artistic activity located between the two of them on one side, and Dado Djuric and Vojo Stanic on the other. Present here, in this space there are also reminiscences of Ilija Sobajic (1876–1953), Vladimir Novosel (1883–1961), Pero Pocek (1878–1963), as well as many others, both known and unknown. I felt that the new epoch had interfered through its post-visual tendencies by rejecting classical art values and technologies. This is noticeable in those investigations made by artists in Podgorica and Cetinje, which do not belong to the artistic or the visual in a narrower sense, but are strongly related to the extended scene of false global glamour. Their tendency is to be innovative at any cost, but what they achieve is only fancy effects. That is how the post-visual tendencies for disposable usage have become the main stream that floods over all the previous fine art

<sup>3</sup> The prohibition of smoking in enclosed spaces was introduced much later.

<sup>4</sup> Grga Gamulin, Marin Tartaglia, Zora, Zagreb 1955.

<sup>5</sup> Emphasis by V.B.S.

postulates. It should be noted that the visual “tsunami” has nevertheless been averted, at least for the time being. The participants in these streams are “networked” in an attempt to remove conventional art from the face of the earth, to dry off that bough so they can survive the moment in which they are functioning. This total eradication has not yet yielded the desired results. Considering all of this we should also bear in mind the events surrounding the shutting down of the Art School in Herceg Novi and the founding of the Faculty of Fine Arts in Cetinje, which has made the art environment in Montenegro more complex and has transformed it.

I notice that Todorovic is an excellent conversationalist. He talks about everything with ease, but when it comes to his work – he tenses up! He tries to hide this current shyness either with a “bossy attitude” or through humorous anecdotes, which explain his general views on artistic quests. He does not speak about his paintings; he thinks about them only for himself, keeping them secret until they “come out into the light of day”. It becomes clear to me that the man in front of me is not a brawler, as he wants to present himself, but an artist preoccupied with his art – everything else is an external shell. Somewhere he wrote down: “When an artist is a narcissist – that is an innate natural condition.”<sup>6</sup> It seems to me that this was more of a posturing than an attitude. After a few meetings I realised that insisting on some sort of narcissism is not posturing, but a defence mechanism. There primarily pervades a desire to penetrate into his work on his own and not to be helped in this by anyone else. “For me, art is resistance, defence – better yet, a healing self-defence!”<sup>7</sup> Time is an “unidentified” category for Todorovic. I get the impression that he refuses to accept the existence of Morning, Noon and Evening on one hand and Night on the other, and that nothing about him is closely related to these frames of reference. It is absolutely all the same whether I am right or not.

That is how I experienced Rajko Todorovic Todor in April 2008. Subsequent meetings have not changed this essence, but have supplemented it. Since I have dealt mainly with daily art criticism for over forty years, and have rarely gotten into another way of looking at artistic attitudes, I could not resist publishing, on the occasion of this first meeting, a critique of Todorovic’s exhibition of drawings in the newspaper “Vecernje Novosti”. This is neither a tribute nor an act of courtesy, but an internal need. I did not even think that this occasion would lead in the directions I would move along while analysing his work and personality. I was aware that a long process awaited me, during which I had to familiarise myself with his work.

In order to clarify this to the eventual reader I pass on this text as it was published in “Vecernje Novosti”.

<sup>6</sup> Published in the catalogue of the exhibition by Rajko Todorovic Todor, Artistic Pavilion, Association of Fine Artists of Montenegro, Podgorica, 2000.

<sup>7</sup> Published in the catalogue of the exhibition by Rajko Todorovic Todor, Artistic Pavilion, Association of Fine Artists of Montenegro, Podgorica, 2000.

## THE HONESTY OF THE INTIMATE

The exhibition of drawings by Rajko Todorovic Todor at the gallery of the Centre of Modern Art in Podgorica

The character of Rajko Todorovic Todor's painting style can be clearly seen in the drawings he exhibited at the Centre of Modern Art's gallery in Podgorica. All the vital elements of visual expression that he has been fostering were present here, while being liberated from the sediment that the painting carries within it. They represent an X-ray of the essence that he is pursuing. When one puts aside all the many factors except the vital ones, the true starting point is laid bare. Generally, Todorovic has not lost what he rejected by doing this. It has remained in his visual memory so it could spark with a different glow again on a painting. A drawing, not in the form of a sketch, but as a final experience, signifies purification and rejection of unnecessary data that must find its place on a painting. Todorovic's drawings presented at this exhibition were realised in Indian ink and emphasise the deepest feelings the artist carries within himself. They can be divided into several parts. The first one is named "Searches" which signifies the desire that is a focal point of human existence and its eternal companion. The second one is represented by "The Beast" which always strikes the same pose, with bared teeth, ready to attack. Fear is instilled even by its shadow, which frightens with its blackness. A separate entity is represented by "Speakers" – an ironic comment on the events taking place in all countries in transition. A cohesive factor between many images are Indian ink stains that accelerate or change the rhythm, enriching the entire contents, throwing a new light on the experience. Different from all the other exhibits is the lonesome "Portrait of Mother", a drawing revealing the deepest and most sincere sense of the tragic. There are no strong gestures or any otherwise present expressive note. A dearly loved face quietly disappears while the decomposition process carries away the image and leaves behind traces of its former existence. That is the most inconspicuous and the strongest piece at the exhibition which, hidden in the artist's intimacy, rises above the rest of the exhibited pictures with its sincerity.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> "Vecernje Novosti", Belgrade, 22 April 2008.

## II

## THE FORMATIVE YEARS

From Niksic via Belgrade to Podgorica

The formation of Rajko Todorovic as an artist began at an early age, when Branko Tomanovic included him in a youth group at the Pioneers' Home in Niksic. They were working on a sculpture in which he felt the volume of the form – this is evident in many of his later paintings, especially those created in the period of his studies at the Faculty of Applied Arts and later on, at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Belgrade. During his first public display in the mid-sixties in which he participated, along with his coursemates<sup>9</sup>, he sensed that art would be his destiny.

In 1964, in his early childhood, he painted *“Ostroska greda”*. It is the only painting that survives from the period of Todorovic's growing up and represents the genuine fantasies of a twelve-year-old to discover his artistic world. This was, obviously, conditioned by his memory and sense of space of the Niksic Plain (Ogradice and Zavrh) as well as the experience of Roman tombstones and the discovery of traces of Illyrian fortified settlements. One cannot refer to this oil on cardboard as a mature work, but it may suggest a very important feeling for the environment which he carried and never abandoned.

This painting did not determine the possible directions of his progress, but it did deepen his awareness of a predestined connection to artistic creativity. It is a *plein air* experience of a landscape in calm colouring which underlines the atmosphere of the scenery, and represents the beginning of an adventure that is still continuing. In his further artistic development, in addition to an expressive approach to art and vigorous drawing – in the broadest sense of the word – a soft Mediterranean atmosphere permeates his work. In a conversation, he mentioned: “I believe that expression is a means and not an end. I felt Soutine to be someone very close to me. His complexity makes me comprehend him as a classical artist – his painting comprised both spirit and substance. The others turned everything into gesture.”<sup>10</sup>

He studied at the Faculty of Fine Arts (FFA) with other two contemporaries from Niksic<sup>11</sup>. In 1980, with them and six other coursemates and compatriots, he established the group *“Generation 9”*. I can vaguely remember the existence of this group that

<sup>9</sup> Bjelica, Micunovic, Vusovic, Buric and Vilotijevec.

<sup>10</sup> From the conversations we had during June 2010 at his studio in Podgorica.

<sup>11</sup> Bjelica and Buric.

was formed in the late seventies by FFA students who had come from Montenegro to study art. More precisely, I remember the exhibition at the gallery of the Faculty of Fine Arts in Belgrade at which Radomir Reljic wrote in March 1980: “An essential element that connects them is the commitment of these nine artists to figurative expression.”<sup>12</sup> On this occasion Todorovic presented two paintings from the “*Relations*” series, one dating from 1979 and the other from 1980<sup>13</sup>, which were later, on several occasions, exhibited and published in catalogues. In the preface, Reljic notes the characteristic expression of these young people: “The heterogeneity of their figurative expression is very rich. Each one of these personalities is aiming to find his artistic vision.” Todorovic belongs entirely to the aspirations that Reljic called “heterogeneous figurative expression”, but he supplemented these with experiences of colour and abstract refraction while “searching for his artistic vision”. He was aware that the world in its events is broken into fragments of distorted and unusual shapes and that this is reflected in the fate of the artist. This was the time when young artists, inspired by their older colleagues, formed art groups similar to those of the nineteen-fifties<sup>14</sup>.

Todorovic was, regardless of all visual differences, close to the other members of **Generation 9** through, as Reljic noted, “figurative expression”. He followed what he found around him in those years, while Pavle Vasic followed the FFA gallery exhibition with the words that Todorovic was the only one from the group “...who opted for expressionism<sup>15</sup>, for a brushstroke that is almost reminiscent of the style of Oskar Herman, but is more related to our style – the local rather than the general – as Herman’s motifs are.”<sup>16</sup> Todorovic’s attachment to Herman could have gained a foothold in the early years of his formation when a certain closeness with the figurative compositions painted by the Croatian artist can be discerned.<sup>17</sup> The range is much broader since this is an inquisitive artist who enters into a finely experienced expressionist action so that he can emerge from it through new viewpoints. Todorovic’s mature years have brought a *painting-in-a-painting* – this was reflected in the harmony or conflict of two opposing methods of artistic expression: the expressive and figurative in a closer plane, and a colouristic and abstractly defined background

<sup>12</sup> “Generation 9” Exhibition Catalogue – “Nine Young Painters”, FFA gallery, 4–20 April 1980, Belgrade.

<sup>13</sup> They were exhibited under the titles “Relations II” and “Relations VII” in 2005, but they were published in the 2005 catalogue on pp. 30–31, both titled “Relations II”.

<sup>14</sup> On this, see: Miodrag B. Protic, *Srpsko slikarstvo 20. veka, odeljak “Sesta decenija, obnova i preporod”*, NOLIT, Beograd, 1970.

<sup>15</sup> Mladen Lompar is of the same opinion: ‘The almost prophetic art of painting by Rajko Todorovic is quite an individual mythology, developed to recognisability. It has been based on the expressionist treatment ever since his first series (*Faces*), with figures and characters without features, full of misery, with extinguished glances and resigned peacefulness or with some aimless movement. Sunken into its greyness, as an accidental finding among recognisable urban details, this personage is, in fact, an unclear print in the service of nonsense. It is already here that he “comes across” the pulse of space and starts to communicate it with almost literary precision. He adopts this feature as a constant in other series.’ *RAJKO TODOROVIC TODOR, Retrospective exhibition*, Centre of Modern Art of Montenegro, Podgorica, 2005.

<sup>16</sup> Pavle Vasic, *Umetnicki zivot, cetvrta knjiga*, Univerzitet umetnosti, Beograd, 1987.

<sup>17</sup> This refers primarily to Herman’s paintings created during the 1960s and a good example of this is the painting “Two in the Landscape” from 1966.

brought through nervous strokes. It was certainly not a well-established pattern by which things unfolded in Todorovic's creativity but it was the most frequent one, since he avoided making schematic developments. This is also the origin of the connecting of his paintings into series where the visual content moves without strict limits but the works themselves determine the framework.

The origins of Todorovic's fine art contemplations should be sought for also in his relationship with composition and colour, that is, in its colouristic contents and the typological form pattern of defining shapes and figures. In mutual interaction, the atmosphere, driven by colouring, defines the shape immersed in poetic tension – in this way he intended to “capture the spirit and matter” while making sure that the painting did not transform into a gesture. In the approach to her research on the oeuvre of Rajko Todorovic, Ljiljana Zekovic clearly observed its sources while emphasising that “the two starting principles – the contemplative and the expressive – initiate the melancholic and euphoric-aggressive side of the existential structure of modern man.”<sup>18</sup> The cited differentiation accurately determines the interests encountered in Todorovic's work which made a significant impact on his approach.

Since his early youth Todorovic has been in the prime of his creative studiosness, but has been noticeably lazy about those things that accompany the creative act: preparations for painting or anything that precedes committing the brush to the canvas. In one place he frankly admits: “It is only the act of painting that fulfils and is worthy of an artist. All actions that occur before and after that I hate and I experience as coercion.”<sup>19</sup> I was convinced of this during our conversations in his studio. He talked with fervour, but this would disappear as soon as I asked him to pull out a painting that was hidden behind others. That was the moment when his glumness and complaints about “the poor wretch” started. It is not a matter of being lazy, but it is a mental state that he feels, like a compulsion. “The few exhibitions that I have had the opportunity of seeing during these last years”, Henri Matisse wrote to Henry Clifford, “make me fear that the young painters are avoiding the slow and painful preparation which is necessary for the education of any contemporary painter who claims to construct by colour alone. This slow and painful work is indispensable.”<sup>20</sup> Todorovic, in spite of his statements, stuck to this advice of Matisse's. He stuck to it, although he did not know about it – he felt it inside him.

The only solo exhibition of his work so far was held in Belgrade, at the Kolarcev narodni univerzitet (KNU) gallery<sup>21</sup>. On that occasion he exhibited 25 works in oil

<sup>18</sup> Ljiljana Zekovic, Foreword to the catalogue for Rajko Todorovic Todor's retrospective exhibition, Centre of Modern Art of Montenegro, Podgorica, 2005.

<sup>19</sup> Published in the catalogue of Rajko Todorovic Todor's exhibition, Artistic Pavilion of the Association of Fine Artists of Montenegro, Podgorica, 2000.

<sup>20</sup> A letter from Henri Matisse to Henry Clifford dated 14 February 1948.

<sup>21</sup> Rajko Todorovic Todor, KNU gallery, 5–19 June 1984.

from the series “*Relations*” which have a supple contact with the feeling for the expressionist content composition of Oskar Herman.<sup>22</sup> Todorovic labelled some of the works at this exhibition as parts of the series “*Relations*”, although the same ones can be found as canvases from the “*Scenes*” series. This reinforces the conclusion that the line separating Todorovic’s different series is very loose and that many paintings fit into several thematic blocks. This can also be traced through further research and points to an openness that is not constricted by the limits of the series<sup>23</sup> – works from the series “*Relations/Scenes*” belong to the same 1977–1984 period, a fact that Todorovic emphasises. We can mention that, prior to the exhibition at the KNU gallery, he had two independent shows<sup>24</sup> with similar inaccuracies in marking and dating the series. For this reason, I will treat the series “*Relations*” and “*Scenes*” as one series – “*Relations/Scenes*” and when a work requires closer definition, I will treat them as two separate series.

I began the aforementioned critique in “*Vecernje Novosti*” as follows: “*The character of Rajko Todorovic Todor’s painting style...*” – this represents the essence that interests me – primarily the structure and the profound layer, followed by the relation of form and colour and then the symbolic plane. This indicates that I should reject *the character of the painting styles* of Lubarda and Milunovic as well as the poetic charges of Dado Djuric and Vojo Stanic as basic sources in his work. After freeing myself from the visual residue of the surroundings, I was permitted to come into contact with a completely new artist who had yet to be encountered. He has contact with Lubarda, but it is a conversation through the paintings of a young artist with an older colleague and not the use of Lubarda’s work in deepening Todorovic’s work.

As Todorovic indicates, he feels that El Greco is closer to him than Lubarda is, while Goya is, in his belief, the greatest Expressionist. “Painting is unity”, stated Todorovic, opposing the approach by Jerko Denegri, who once asserted that there exist “conscious and unconscious Expressionists”. He says that this statement has always been, and remains, unclear to him.

Here we are not talking about an isolated path in painting, as it may seem through the presented indications, but about a person that cleared the way for his visual outlook of the world through his artistic emotions. The main stimuli exist within him. “The artists and their works are the Great Path”,<sup>25</sup> says Todorovic. Therefore, research

<sup>22</sup> Rajko Todorovic Todor, retrospective exhibition, Centre of Modern Art of Montenegro, Podgorica, 2005, pp. 30–31 – four reproductions.

<sup>23</sup> Todorovic dated the exhibited series in the catalogue as belonging to the period 1981–1984, while he dated the works from *Scenes* on other occasions as 1979 and 1980. This is a frequent occurrence with him but in no way does it disturb his developmental path. The essential characteristics which would influence the perception of his creativity are not disturbed. This should be stated for reasons of accuracy. The artist is aware of this.

<sup>24</sup> Dom Omladine Gallery, Titograd, 1982 and Modern Gallery, Titograd, 1984 on which I do not have more precise data.

<sup>25</sup> Published in the catalogue of Rajko Todorovic Todor’s exhibition, Artistic Pavilion of the Association of Fine Artists of Montenegro, Podgorica, 2000.

into the character of Todorovic's painting style should begin exactly from that personal aspect. After he created the series *"Vucji Do"*, Olga Perovic stated precisely: "While some of his colleagues adopted more poetic refinement and were more alert in following the world's leading artists, Todorovic, just like Lubarda, turned completely towards his inner self, towards the world from which he originated; he was sincerely excited by the fluctuations occurring in it and established a distinctive relationship with tradition and modern living."<sup>26</sup>

This thought of Goethe's came into my mind: "I have known artists who boasted that they did not study under any master and that they have their own genius to thank for everything. Fools! As if the world is not imposing itself on them everywhere and making something out of them despite their own stupidity."<sup>27</sup> So too, Todorovic carried in his visual memory a "bag-full" of everything and anything, but he searched for his artistic approach outside of that bag. "All value is in the eyes of the painter," exclaimed Marcel Proust.<sup>28</sup> "When I saw an original El Greco, I was amazed! He achieved the greatest spirituality in the densest spreads of painting matter, in that grainy lead-white colour with which he would "spoil" the painting. People are mistaken when they experience El Greco's *"Toledo"* as a landscape. The painting *"Toledo"* is actually called *"A View of Toledo"* and is indicative of this world."<sup>29</sup> Maybe this is the reason why one should look for Todorovic's visual senses in his eyes. A statement by Rudolf Arnheim could be added here: "Thinking is based on images, while images contain the thought and make the object visible."<sup>30</sup>

On the other hand, we should bear in mind that Todorovic thinks in images; this is manifested in his narratives in which he always conjures up an image. More particularly, he follows the presentation of an image that is developing inside him during the narrative and where it is withheld till the moment when it will eventually erupt like a volcano. This is a kind of "thinking in images"<sup>31</sup> which belongs to what Gillo Dorfles mentioned in the explanation – "thinking by means of images may be able to overcome the cultural, doctrinal and existential differences that separate individuals and specific nations from each other; this can be valid as the archetypal expression in communicative behaviour."<sup>32</sup> This is the world of painting to which Todorovic belongs, too – he intuitively sensed and materialised this in his expression during the creative process. This phenomenon is important to him; he uses it to bridge the possible uncertainties of his expression. This leads to the point that a figure itself

<sup>26</sup> Olga Perovic, IZVODI, April 1989, published in RAJKO TODOROVIC TODOR, Retrospective Exhibition, Centre of Modern Art of Montenegro, Podgorica, 2005.

<sup>27</sup> J.P. Eckermann, Conversations with Goethe, The Last Year of His Life, IP "Rad", Belgrade, 1976.

<sup>28</sup> Marcel Proust, In Search of Lost Time, publishers: IRO Matica srpska, IRO "Nolit", IRO: Narodna knjiga", 1983.

<sup>29</sup> A conversation with Todorovic on 18, 19 and 20 June 2010.

<sup>30</sup> Rudolf Arnheim, Visual Thinking, publisher: University of Art, Belgrade, 1985.

<sup>31</sup> Das Bildhafte Denken.

<sup>32</sup> Gillo Dorfles, Praise to Disharmony, SVETOVI, Novi Sad, 1991.

is an expression, but not in the sense in which it is interpreted by post-visual theorists – drowned in transition and the global world without their own artistic standpoint and still unaware of the upcoming digital civilisation and its postulates.

If his work is observed as an anatomy class, we notice that he starts with superficial incisions. He knows that this light touch is only the beginning of the operation and that one needs to penetrate deep into further layers. Otherwise there is no real experience. This is repeated from one series to another. He always starts with a gentle touch which cuts into the character of the event, leading to the study of vital organs and bringing the painting to its fulfilment. Insufficiently explored passages that occur from one period to another or from one series to another come into Todorovic's focus again – but this is always with a tendency to leave it open so that certain problems can be re-investigated. This does not prevent him from stretching again and setting off on an unexpected road.

In the early sixties Todorovic began to think exclusively as a painter. That is why he left high school in 1969 and enrolled in training as an art teacher, graduating in 1972. After this he had to decide where to pursue further training. An inner feeling took him to Belgrade where he deepened his visual presentation, first at the Academy of Applied Arts. "Belgrade was a centre of culture. If something big from the West had to be presented somewhere in the East and if, for example, Moscow, Prague, Warsaw or Belgrade were scheduled for the show then it would always come to Belgrade – the cultural centre of the European East during the seventies and the eighties. It was the place where BITEF (I must mention this, even though I do not like theatre), BEMUS and FEST took place. There was the National Film Archive, which was among the three best film archives in the world at that time. I loved the opera and I went there, hiding from my fellow countrymen so that they would not tease me."<sup>33</sup>

After three years, he left the Academy of Applied Arts disappointed and with failed hopes, despite the support his professors had given him, and did his military service, which was obligatory at that time. He had enough time to reconsider the situation and to decide where to go – whether to return to the Academy of Applied Arts or to choose the Academy of Fine Arts.<sup>34</sup>

After returning from military service, he moved on to the Belgrade Faculty of Fine Arts. Here his first period started, during which the series *"Relations/Scenes"*,

<sup>33</sup> From a conversation held on April 2008 while sitting at a table in a tavern in Hotel Crna Gora in Podgorica.

<sup>34</sup> According to Todorovic's own recollection, when he first came to study in Belgrade, he applied to the Faculty of Fine Arts. After the application process finished, his name was put very high on the published list of accepted candidates. When his friends informed him, he came back to see the list on the announcement board. He found there a completely new list, on which there was neither his name nor that of any of his compatriots. Credible sources acquainted with the way things happened at the Academy testified to me that such cases had occurred there but they were always attributed to errors that accompanied the first list! It was nothing other than that someone had been placed on the list of accepted candidates by some other means.

*“Faces”* and *“Carrion/Beasts”* were created. At the time, however, he was not yet sure whether he would give the paintings titles and organise them in series.<sup>35</sup> He met people with whom he would deepen his knowledge and have his eyes opened to a series of new art-related issues. Andre Gide stated in one place: “(...) every theory is good only if it enables *not inactivity but the hardest work*,” which is something that Todorovic intuitively feels. He anxiously creates large numbers of drawings and paintings. He rejects the approach often present with artists – “to achieve a strong impression in as easy a manner as possible (...) which soon ceases to be convincing. It does not even make any impression.”<sup>36</sup> This he did not learn from the writer of the *Aesthetic Vocabulary* but he carried it in himself. His work continued with a passion which is not lacking in him. On the contrary: it flows strongly through his veins.

Jan Parandovski once rejected inspiration as something considered unavoidable, noting that it was “replaced by other deities: Work, Patience and Will. Without a strong will there is no great creator.”<sup>37</sup> With Todorovic this is evident in the approach through which he establishes an intimate relation with the canvas in the process of its transformation into a painting. Nevertheless, inspiration is the initial trigger that opens up the talent. This can be observed with every artist whose work, like Todorovic’s, radiates from within. The impression is that he is not painting on the canvas but attacking it in a furious ecstasy. He carries fire in himself, a fire that bursts into flame with “a paintbrush, knife or spatula on canvas” regardless of the series he is currently working on. He is carrying “the sun in his eyes” which illuminates his path. The colour in his paintings finds its own place by relaxing the form that Todorovic, at one moment, squeezes and then lets “breathe more freely”. He does not look for colours and shapes on the outside but finds them within, fixed in his memory.

It is meaningless to point to the influences which an artist undergoes during education. With Todorovic it is not about imitation, but analysing the artworks of artists close to him. The appearance of similarity is inevitable and, while it perhaps remains on the exterior, it does not interfere with either personal development or the overall work. That is the price an artist pays while searching for himself and his artistic identity. Baudelaire wrote: “The painting primarily has to represent the artist’s personal thoughts.”<sup>38</sup> He realised this at the very beginning, as well as seeing that the focus is not on what one has to choose but on what one has to reject!

By the end of his studies, a major Emil Nolde exhibition<sup>39</sup> was held at the Museum of Modern Art in Belgrade. This event shook up the whole generation and assured

<sup>35</sup> “I make series of paintings. I never give them individual titles. If they are worthy let them fight for their own title.” Individual exhibition catalogue, Artistic Pavilion, Association of Fine Artists of Montenegro, Podgorica, 2000.

<sup>36</sup> Roger Caillois, *Aesthetic Vocabulary*, Knjizevna zajednica Novog Sada, Novi Sad, 1982.

<sup>37</sup> *Alchemy of Words*, KULTURA, 1964, Belgrade.

<sup>38</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *Thoughts*, Alef, Gradac, Cacak, 2004.

<sup>39</sup> Emil Nolde exhibition, Museum of Modern Art, Belgrade, 20 December 1978–15 February 1979.

Todorovic<sup>40</sup> that he was on the right path to establishing a balance between expressive drawing and strong colouristic sensation – he had reached the comprehension that was to accompany him throughout his creative life.

Van Gogh's views are deeply inscribed in his visual memory, especially a sentence in which the great Dutch master characterises the world around him – “I want to express the most horrifying human passions through my red and green colours!” This was what helped Todorovic mark more precisely the symbolism of his own palette and the psychological approach to the problem dealt with in the painting. His colours and strokes were given a direction which, with slight displacements, marked his further progress.

The timeframes attributed to his works must be taken with caution. When, for instance, he says: “I worked on the series “*Carrion*” and “*Vucji Do*” from 1985 to 1991”<sup>41</sup> that is true but not necessarily accurate. The main work takes place during the specified timeframe but the knowledge retained in the visual memory often comes to the surface again “whenever I feel the need for it”, says the artist. In another place he suggests: “Artists and their works form the Great Path.”<sup>42</sup> To follow Todorovic along this path requires no effort, since the simplicity of the procedure does away with confusion and clearly defines the layers through which the work exists. They all derive from each other and require the spectator to become more familiar with his efforts. Namely, Todorovic tries and manages to explain everything up to that limits when the content becomes legible in the finest details, so that it can be followed without stuttering. The most difficult thing to achieve in art is a sublimation which refines a work, leading it to condense back down.

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<sup>40</sup> Answering my question about whether he had seen Nolde, Todorovic said: “I saw Nolde then and even today I remember some of his watercolours”, letter dated 9 September 2010.

<sup>41</sup> Todorovic, in his 2000 catalogue.

<sup>42</sup> Todorovic, in his 2000 catalogue.

## III

## THE YEARS OF MATURING

## From Belgrade to Podgorica

Todorovic's artistic adventure began in years of personal failures, re-examinations and familiarisation with Belgrade and its surroundings. He finished his studies at the Faculty of Fine Arts and graduated at the time when Josip Broz died. It was a time of social fractures, reshaping of previous structures and uncertainties about the coming future. Todorovic was not interested in political activity, nor did the turning points in the country influence him in artistic terms. However, they did afford him space to search for his inner being and beliefs. The late eighties' atmosphere of absolute freedom that rejected restraints and "promised" that no more bans or orders would be repeated favoured Todorovic's activities.

That was when Todorovic started "cleansing" those layers that had burdened his painting. He pushed aside all factors except those vital ones, thus determining the Path for his searches. He does not reject the essence – sometimes, before the burst of the new, the essence retreats, to return when he feels the need for it. That is when it sparkles anew as if it had always been there. His drawing is an "executioner", who mercilessly discards superfluous data, thus cleansing visual concepts. Regular visits to cinematic showings at the Yugoslav Film Archive played an exceptional role in his visual maturing. The film productions left an impression on him – primarily the black and white silent films in the works of German Expressionism, whose "moving pictures" yielded creative juices that were essential for this young man and made it possible for new horizons to open up to him. Some scenes from *Battleship Potemkin* even today arouse powerful feelings in him. Foremost in his mind are not memories of the famous scene in which the baby's pram falls down the steps.<sup>43</sup> He considers that commonplace, while he is excited by the circles that appear in the water after the glasses of a drowning man fall. He transferred that excitement onto some of his canvases.<sup>44</sup> During the conversation he mentioned that Griffith's films impress him the most visually. He does not mention Griffith's main work "The Birth of a Nation", but other films by the director, with special emphasis on "Intolerance". If the Academy was a kind of first home during his stay in Belgrade, then the Yugoslav Film Archive was surely his second home. This film, in which everything is based on image, was a great school for him – from it he absorbed and froze the moving pictures. He defrosts them whenever he feels the need to, often doing this unconsciously.

<sup>43</sup> Todorovic talked about this in an interview held on 19 June 2010.

<sup>44</sup> It can be presumed that the series "Sole Mio" started out there or, at least, that was the place where it was liberated from his memory and committed to canvas.

Rajko Todorovic's work forms a single unit and indicates the established artistic handwriting that was anticipated at the very beginning of his education and was eventually built upon. There are no sudden and unnecessary jumps or turns. Everything results logically from itself. Still, it cannot be said that Todorovic's creativity is calm. On the contrary, it is extremely tempestuous, full of energy that lights and sparks. Each succeeding canvas or sheet of paper opens up a new line of research and discoveries that enrich his visual vocabulary.

Approaching particular issues is a special sort of excitement for him. Although he avoids stylistic unity, it nonetheless forms an inseparable part of his artistic personality. "Stylistic unity belongs to museums and the past"<sup>45</sup>, stated Lazar Trifunovic, considering that the idea of the style of an epoch no longer exists, but that each creator explores his real world in which every real situation is subject to a change of visual approach.

Todorovic's series express his visual ideas through different forms of art. This refers primarily to colour and the coloured layer. It looks as if there is no change and yet it all changes under the influence of new and different emphases. Over time a changed optics opens up the possibility of a new reading. This does not begin at the moment of the conception of the series, but at the moment of a deepening of what was formerly determined through universal points and what has obtained a fuller resonance through interventions. His starting point is a reflection of his own soul and not the general visual environment of the last few decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which had gone through empirical changes in experiencing paintings and artworks. The process has not been completed.

Todorovic said: "I am aspiring to a painting that will resist logic and make it impenetrable to deciphering. The painting must have a multiple-meaning and contradictory logic; it must be opposed to any safety and ease in reading; it has to upset and resist."<sup>46</sup> These lines bear witness to the fact that insights always originate from him and return back to him changed. After this there ensues their melting into new artistic frameworks that shape the experience. He is sure that times of liberty do not lull the spirit, as is commonly thought, because it is during times of freedom and peace that the essences of recent events are perceived.

Portraits and figures are basic factors in the complete oeuvre of Rajko Todorovic, which is shaped by the coloured layer. They appear at the very beginning of his work thus determining the tension of his painting. The figure, as a supporting structural element, is present in his drawings and it reinforces its position with the appearance

<sup>45</sup> Lazar Trifunovic, *From Impressionism to Informel*, Belgrade, NOLIT, 1982.

<sup>46</sup> From the catalogue for the individual exhibition held in 2000 at the Artistic pavilion of the Association of Fine Artists of Montenegro, p. 61. Here, under the term "ease of reading", he does not mean that everything should be stirred up, but that it should be simplified, thus making the painting an essential phenomenon.

of colour in the series *“Scenes/Relations”*, while occupying a central place in the *“Vucji Do”*, *“View”* and *“Adam and Eve”* series.

Portraits form a particular chapter in Todorovic’s oeuvre; through them he studied relationships between colour and form, crossing masses with each other and giving them a unique sound.<sup>47</sup> This started towards the end of his studies and has lasted up to the present day, when his colouristic masses are significantly different.

Colour in Todorovic’s work determines the psychological level of the painting. Its changes start with *“Faces”*, *“Scenes”* and *“Relations”* while they acquire a full tone in *“Beasts”* and *“Carrion”*. In the *“Vucji Do”* series, the colouristic patterns of *“Scenes”* and *“Faces”* are united, while important shifts are taking place in *“Krnovo”*, *“Terra Terabilita”* and *“Mediterranean”*. The series *“Memory”*, a special and short-lived chapter in Todorovic’s oeuvre, absorbed the characteristics of psychological portraits, bringing up more striking technological innovations by the introduction of non-painting materials – most frequently sand – on the canvas. In this way Todorovic was breaking through the canvas surface, thus achieving a tactility which would grow over time and become an important, almost inseparable part of the series *“View”*. In the period between 2009 and 2011, colour reached its highest level of tremulousness and independence; that was when Todorovic fully swept through the *“Adam and Eve”* series by applying the paint straight from the tube with a palette knife or a spatula.

A contemporary artwork is simultaneously a timeless balance, a raw fact and an idea brought to exaggeration. Today’s artistic moment is loaded with stylistic features which should more closely mark the phenomenon. In these features, however, there are located numerous artists who belong to all classifications – and also to none of them. The crowd is dispersed, thus creating confusion rather than clarification. Many artists die in a creative sense the very same day they appear. It is a continuous “dance of a butterfly” during which those who seemed to have a firmly fixed place disappear, too. One must bear this in mind while investigating artistic and visual phenomena. There exists a ruthless competition between tradition and fashionable prejudice. Imposition does not determine the course of art – this is something that would be clear even to Zhdanov today. “Modern Classicism of the 20th Century”, conceived as a counterweight to the appearance of photography as a technologically superior post-visual medium, is experiencing its last days. André Gide writes: “Photography has liberated painting from certain incidental values”. He also observes that craftsmanship “should not be ignored, just adjusted” since “the skills of a craftsman ensure lasting qualities for the canvas”. Here Gide does not mean poetic, but physical, compatibility. It is clear that the liberation from “certain incidental values” must not interfere with the foundation of the painting.

<sup>47</sup> André Maurois in his “Promised Land”, when describing the paintings by a woman artist, said: “You are like Anger with an El Greco eye”, which is also evident in Todorovic’s portraits.

The events that have occurred in art during recent decades can also be perceived as an acceptance of the warning by Giulio Carlo Argan that “the death of art” is approaching. Today those processes which search mostly randomly and forcefully for new ways of expression highlight this fact. We can only speculate on whether they will find them.

It is impossible to classify Rajko Todorovic’s visual reflections in one direction or in narrow poetics since his activities go beyond those limits – he is looking for links that will determine his inner desires in the best manner. Olga Perovic believes that Todorovic is one of “the most distinctive and original” artists and that he is an artist who “creatively grows without *abrupt changes and substantial about-turns*”. These views are not an overstatement, but an accurate observation and one must agree with this.

In classifying his work into a few periods, I wish to point out the processes that took place within certain timeframes, while occasionally incorporating various thematic, colouristic and symbolic patterns of Todorovic’s, as well as the typological varieties that follow the visual thread of certain phases.

Space and time are important factors in the work of every artist. Rajko Todorovic organised his research into series, that is, “he paints in series because one painting is not enough for him to express the broad entirety of the topic that occupies him”.<sup>48</sup> Actually, he develops a theme in a typological pattern, where colour and form play the most important role. Even so, he does not fit in with those programmed artists who cover thematically narrow typological varieties, but rather with those who follow those feelings that excite them from within.

His work is characterised by a fine, indisputable visual logic, through which he monitors the situation on the canvas, a situation that originates from him and in which there is no wandering. Everything is specified at the very beginning. He is not looking for the genesis of his approach, but for the internal visual need that he carries.

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<sup>48</sup> Olga Perovic, Excerpts, Rajko Todorovic Todor Exhibition, Artistic Pavilion, Association of Fine Artists of Montenegro, Podgorica, 2000.

# IV TYPOLOGICAL PATTERNS

The typological determination of Todorovic's way of painting is, in fact, a tracking of changes in colour and form through series of portraits, figures and landscapes. The constant changing of starting point influences the connecting of the same or similar codes into an entirety, set in **PERIODS** that are determined by the timeframes in which he explores the series linked by thematic content and motif.

Unique traits in Todorovic's approach to composition can be observed when looking at the part of his oeuvre which is thematically linked to portraits and figures. Through portraits and figures, Todorovic expresses his deepest intimate feelings, his fears and hopes, and he emphasises this through vibrant colours and compositional settings that determine the atmosphere.<sup>49</sup>

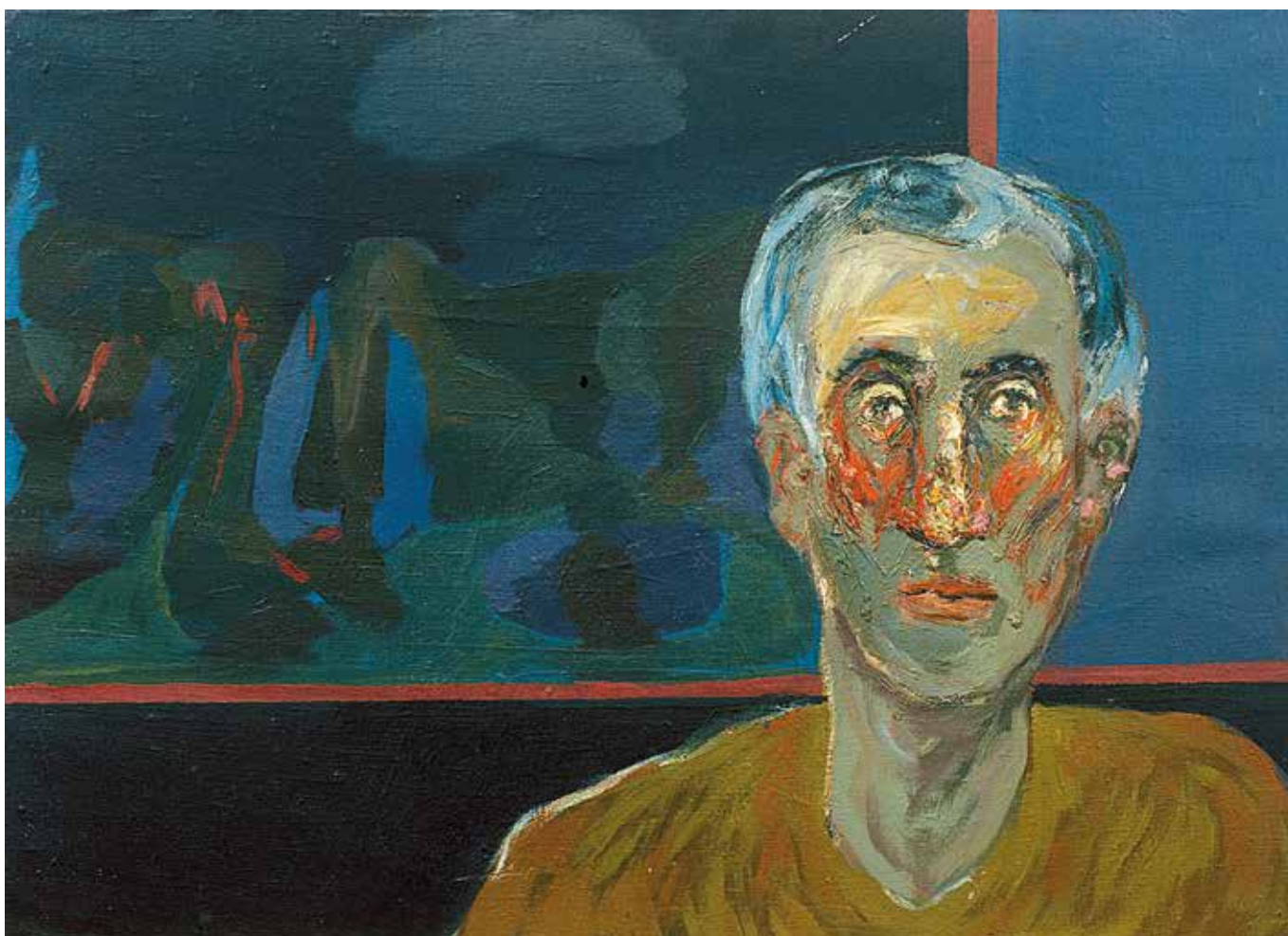
**PORTRAIT/FIGURE** starts with *"Faces"* which lays the foundation that continues in *"Relations"* and *"Scenes"*. Further on, the detailing is followed in the series *"Carrion"*, *"Beasts"*, *"Vucji Do"*, *"Relations II"*, *"Sole Mio"*, *"Memory"* and *"View"*.

These typological patterns form the skeleton of his interest. In **PORTRAIT** he starts a defining, which changes its apparent forms through thematically profiled series. Todorovic's creativity never loses its rhythm, nor does it fall into the habit of repeating the same sensation.

Two watercolours, in poor physical condition today, indicate the origin of Todorovic's initial position when solving the challenges imposed by portraits.<sup>50</sup> He used them to emphasise what has interested him from the very beginning: research into the internal state of a personality through an examination of portrait touches, but without striving for total external similarity. On those two torn and washed out watercolours, made with not much pigment and a lot of water, are the roots of what was to follow: Todorovic's feeling for form and colour. It is evident that Todorovic had

<sup>49</sup> "Todorovic", as Olga Perovic precisely notes, "is a consistent figurative artist. Through a highly free and independent style of painting humans, by defining the relation between his character and space and a highly reduced number of other visual signs around the figure, through unrestrained and uncontrolled colours, a strong gesture and a sharp stroke, he creates a special reflective entirety out of the painting." Olga Perovic, Excerpts, Rajko Todorovic Todor Exhibition, Artistic Pavilion, Association of Fine Artists of Montenegro, Podgorica, 2000.

<sup>50</sup> Todorovic pulled these two watercolours out of somewhere in his studio and showed them to me as an example of his early interest in portraits.



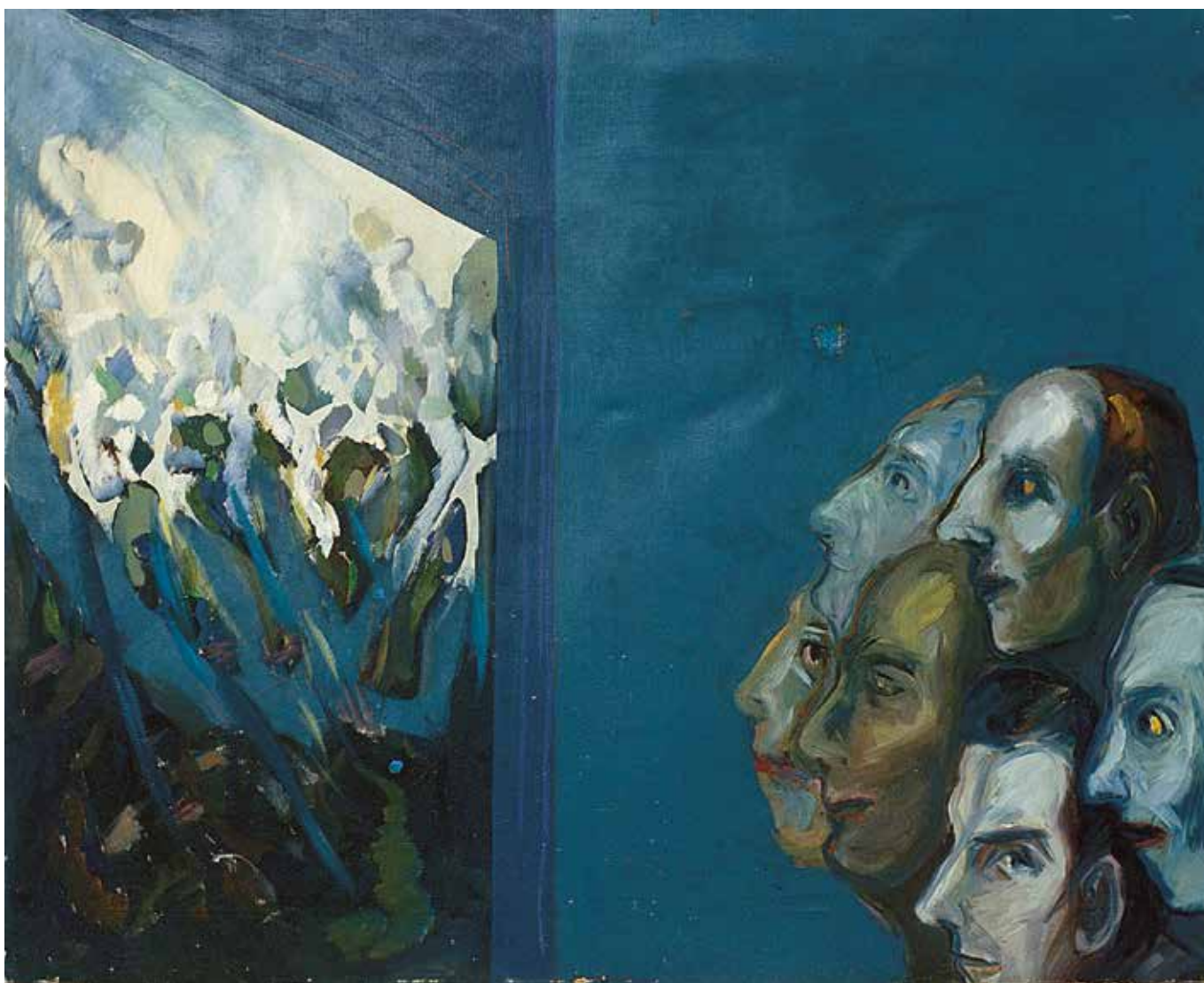
"Faces", oil on canvas, 29x22cm, 1977

mixed feelings and did not have his type of portrait. However, he was searching for the challenge from within that this theme provided, considering, as Picasso did, that in a portrait what is important is inner strength and not resemblance.<sup>51</sup>

In the student phase of the *"Faces"* series (1976–1979) an aspiration for an internal and not external connection with the human face is implied. I emphasise here the word "human", because he referred in the same manner to the animal's heads and snouts in the *"Carrion"*, *"Beasts"* and *"Vući Do"* series of paintings.<sup>52</sup> In the red and white series *"Beasts"* we can identify the quests for the animal's internal states expressed through the rage typical of these creatures.

<sup>51</sup> Writing about Picasso, Gertrude Stein notes that, around 1909, Picasso "used to say that Spaniards cannot recognise people from their photographs. Photographers make (...) two types and families always think that the photograph always looks like that man", Gertrude Stein, Picasso, Umetnicko drustvo Gradac, Cacak-Belgrade, 2000.

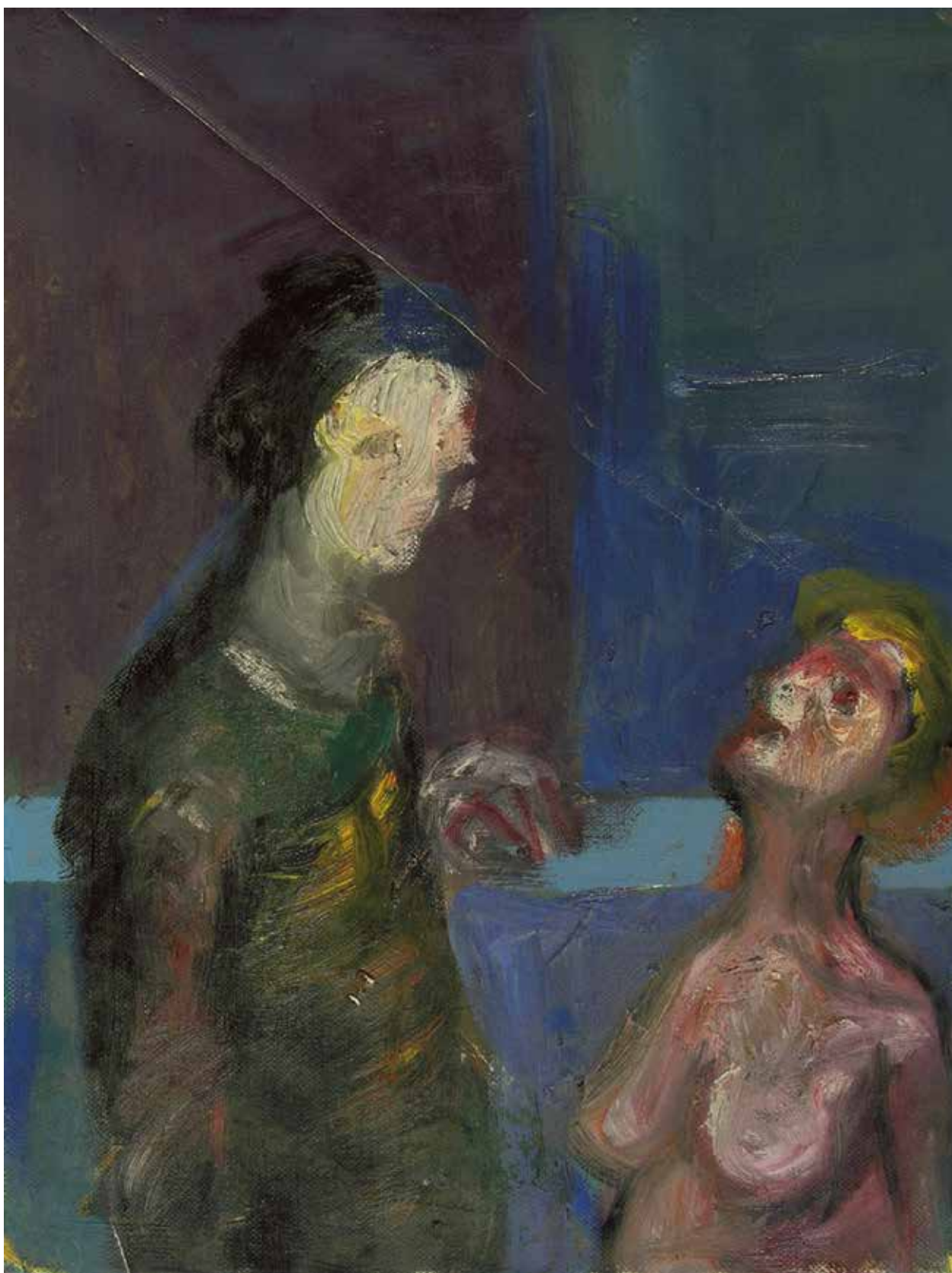
<sup>52</sup> The function and approach to painting of the skull analysed by Miquel Barceló, with whom Todorovic found a similarity in form, are quite different. There are some points of contact but the complex forms and colour treatments, as well as the symbolic message, are different.



“Scenes”, oil on canvas, 100x120cm, 1979

The paintings that followed abandoned surface-level resolving of the background, so he was searching for different solutions. A typical example is *“Face”*, oil on canvas from 1977, which was resolved through sculptural interventions. The figure has not yet been precisely defined and external resemblance has been avoided and directed towards the inner psychological state. Development continued with the painting *“Scene”* (1979) where a group of six figures is looking through a window at an event taking place outside the room in which they are located. The colouristic solutions are slightly shifted compared to *“Face”* (1977). *“Scene”* (1979)<sup>53</sup> actually extends the sense of *“Faces”* from 1977 and the subsequent portraits. This does not end the deepening of contact with *“Scene”* (1979) but

<sup>53</sup> Ljiljana Zekovic notes precisely that “these portraits are a symbol of rebellion against individualism and the disintegration of a personality that is deprived of its Ego. In fact, the Ego exists only as a part of this world and we exist as its universality”, Ljiljana Zekovic, p. 33, RAJKO TODOROVIC TODOR exhibition catalogue, Centre of Modern Art of Montenegro, Podgorica, 2005.



“Scenes”, oil on canvas, 40,5x30cm, 1979



“Scenes”, oil on canvas, 60x80cm, 1979

resolves each of the six figures in a different colouristic manner. It indicates an interest in making a painting-within-a-painting which would grab Todorovic’s particular interest and would appear in all the subsequent series. The colouristic and formed experiences of the individual characters in the paintings on one hand, and group portraits on the other, are close to each other but the former is part of an unit while the latter is a separate integrated phenomenon with all its principles embedded in a common event. At this stage Todorovic had mixed feelings and did not have a clearly defined approach, nor did these feelings consciously resolve the task of a painting-in-a-painting – rather they were submitting themselves to the challenge offered by the theme with a chance that further development would expand the visual interests. It is an important link in his reflections which suggests that he always leaves everything open – the colour, the shape and the manner of composing the content – so that he can return to it when he feels the need.

In the series “*Faces*” and “*Scenes*” Todorovic rotated two settings of one composition: the first one, in which a character emerges out of a colouristic crater and the other in which he defines the space, which indicates that the portrait and figure were the subject of his interest during the early phases. The background layer as something

that did not concern him particularly at that moment and served more to emphasise a face with “sore eyes” that float in a dark blue environment.

It was a period during which Todorovic was still tense and a present fear of spreading out was present with him. This did not last long and already in the late nineteen-seventies the canvas or the paper was freed from any restraints and it became more playful, thematically more diverse and colouristically more joyful – this is something that accompanies his paintings right up to the present day, when colouristic expression is reaching its highest point yet.

There is another line of organisation of the canvas in the painting *“Face”* from 1977 in which the action is divided into three planes. These three segments present a counterbalance to the colourfully playful character – its appearance clearly reflects the internal anxiety caused by external stimuli. This is an indication of Todorovic’s total liberation from restraints which had numbed the dynamics in previous portraits. Once he had resolved the initial problems and freed the painting of constraints, the canvas began to live to its fullest.

In the early period of the *“Faces”* series there is usually present a figure visible down to the waist, whose face reflects its inner feelings. This is, in fact, some compression of the face and figure into a single event that is followed up in most of Todorovic’s series. In 1977 he paid special attention to details that would bring to the painting volume and a greater possibility for playing with colour – this is evident when resolving the relations between masses. These breakthroughs became the basis of subsequent visual tasks. At times, the bust disappeared or returned according to the requirement imposed by the face. *“Face”*, which is also dated 1977, is immersed in a dark colouring, and is a typical example of the other side of the same event and is seen again in the gouache *“Faces”*. The background gained a more important function by becoming a trademark, regardless of whether the background layer, broken into three geometric entities, has the function of making the clash between the abstract and figurative concepts of the painting start. That is also where a more free-thinking experimenting started: from a tempestuous background that has an abstract colouristic composition, he drew out a figure that could blend in with the background if it had no restricted form, while in the second one Todorovic’s call to open up the painting in a colouristic manner becomes clear while confronting two different approaches to the canvas. Besides these investigations, there were portraits of Stanko Zecevic, Milutin Kopanja and, I believe, Milutin Dragojlovic,<sup>54</sup> with whom he was studying at university at that time.

In 2003–2004 Todorovic went back to *“Faces”* but with a changed point of observation and analysis. These paintings do not follow what happened in *“Faces”* at the

<sup>54</sup> Todorovic’s identification of figures.



“Face”, gouache-paper, 17x18,5cm, 1979

beginning of his career, nor do they look for the lines that appeared in the *“Relations II”* or *“Memory”* series – this was an entirely new experience: he drew the figure out of colouristic stains. This figure expressed its psychological states immersed in the coloured content and with precisely expressed internal moods. He paints the positive and the negative on a sheet of paper with acrylic paint, as if he wishes to illuminate it from all sides, entering into the character which he accentuates with colouristic stains.

This series of faces is Todorovic’s incidental line that ran parallel with the main part of the other two typological blocks (*“Relations II”* and *“Sole Mio”*), with which it was simultaneously created. The second series of *“Faces”* can be observed also as a

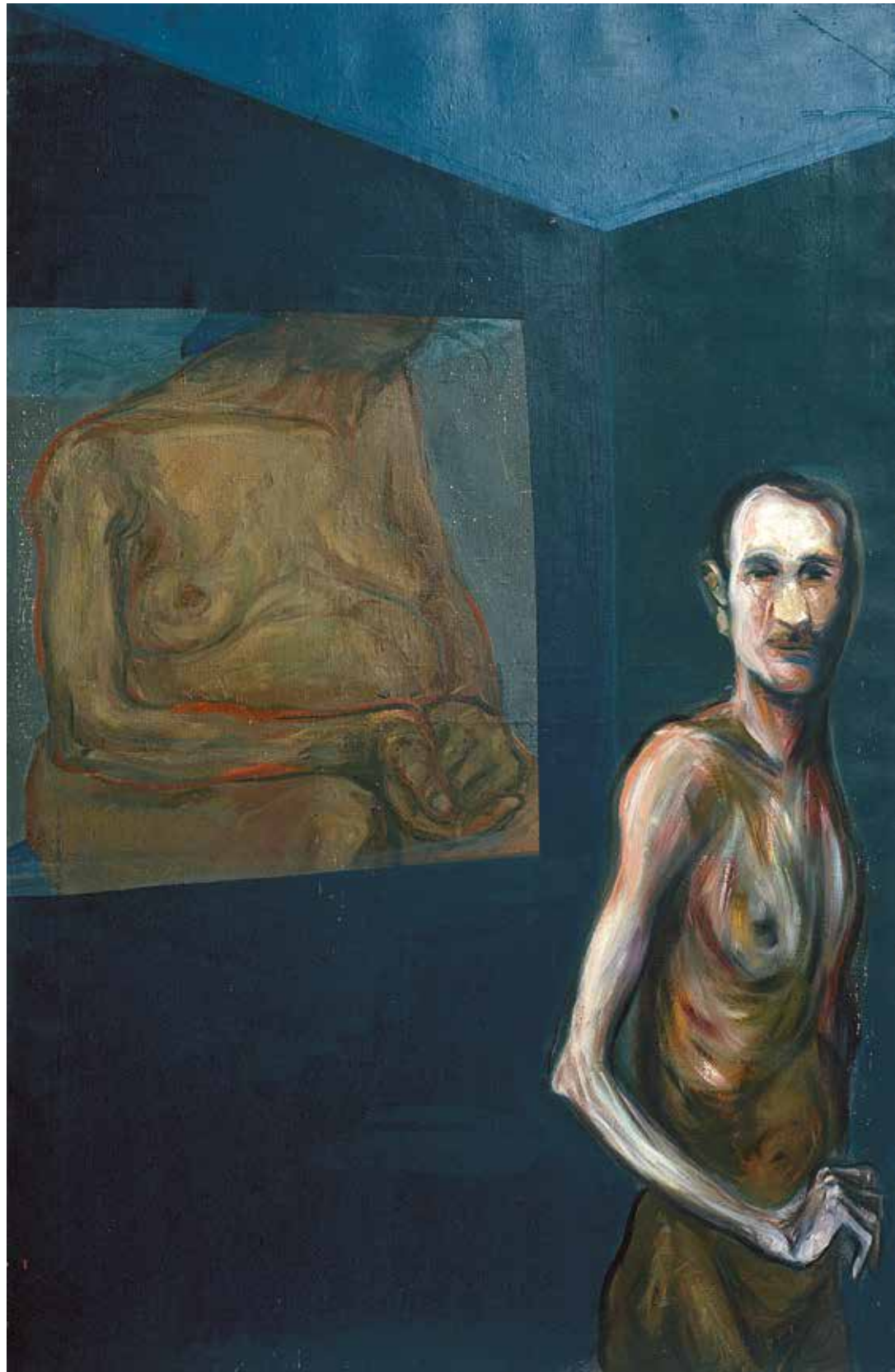


“Relations II”, oil on canvas, 70x100cm, 1999

message from a notebook although the presentations have all the characteristics of the final visual process that significantly influenced events as a whole in *“Sole Mio”*.

A stronger psychological shift began with *“Relations II”* which was completely oriented towards research into the internal states of the personality portrayed and embedded in the composition. Todorovic did this with no pomp or splendour, by shyly extending the line of inquiry that he was following in *“Faces”*, *“Relations”*, *“Carrion/Beasts”* and the *“Vucji Do”* series, where heads already had the lines of the internal temporary state, as well as the profiles of the character itself. The incarnadine of the cut-off heads on the field of Vucji Do is given strength by the “evil land”.<sup>55</sup> In the second case, the incarnadine in the series *“Relations II”* is framed with a black or yellow frame, so that the paintings reflect the expressive condition of the personality which is emphasised in heavy red and black passages that are underlined with blue and white/

<sup>55</sup> This is an expression of Todorovic’s.



"Relations", oil on canvas, 140x52cm, 1979



“Scenes”, oil on canvas, 100x75cm, 1980

blue parts in the background. We are talking about a complex series of Todorovic's portraits in which the interaction of the figure and the face/head is placed in a variable space, crowded with symbolic meanings. Large chunks of pigment increase and decrease according to the artist's feelings, and there appear interventions with liquids which determine the dynamics of the canvas while in search of the final view. The painting then gets a new fullness and talks in a tough and burdened vocabulary that reflects the psychological state of the portrayed. External manifestations of internal moods are added to facial expressions: fear, hate, confusion, joy, sadness and calmness. These are not just the character's features, but the overall organisation of the composition, the determination of form as well as the colouristic dialogue between the character and the background. It is the overall psychological portrait in which the character has its part exposed to moods which are outside of him and mostly serve just as a framework for the portrait. There Todorovic reaches the highest point of colouristic features, as well as the physical and mental condition of the portrayed, uniting all this with the symbolic level. Thereby the portraits in *"Relations II"* cease to be merely portraits and develop into a symbol that was to become a trademark of Todorovic's way of thinking. This is reflected not only in the central motif (the head), but also in the interaction with all the components of his painting.

This series and the approach to solving problems, which also has a retroactive effect, form the framework to this period, since they open up a broader view on the previous series. The white or red beasts come closer to the observer and through them he starts to explore other relations and not just those that first catch his eye. The series *"Relations II"* makes possible another reading of the beginnings of Todorovic's portraiture, or rather, it opens up the possibility for yet another interpretation, different from the one that was initially imposed. This explains Todorovic's revisiting of solutions from the past and his tendency to show them once again and display them now with his conscious initiation of a new interpretation. This is present in the earliest portraits, as well as in the later ones, such as with the head in *"Vucji Do"*.

As was mentioned, in his oeuvre there are no closed phases with precisely determined limits, in which a phenomenon lasts, but these phases constantly transit from one to the next, interfering with each other. After the series *"Faces"*, by the end of the nineteen-seventies, Todorovic's creativity had passed through various stages in the series *"Scenes"*, *"Relations"*, *"Beasts"*, *"Carrion"*, *"Vucji Do"*, *"Relations II"*, *"Krnovo"*, *"Terra Terabilita"* and *"Mediterranean"*. In the period 2000–2008 he reconnected the link with the supporting motif of the series *"Faces"* – the portrait – in which he introduced new experiences that enrich the painting by penetrating into other pores of his research.

The portraits in the series *"Faces"*, *"Relations II"* and *"Memory"* do not represent fictitious or fictional, but real characters imbued with Todorovic's breath, thus indicating how he experienced them. He was not looking for resemblance to the



“Krnovo”, acrylic, 72x50,5cm, 1991

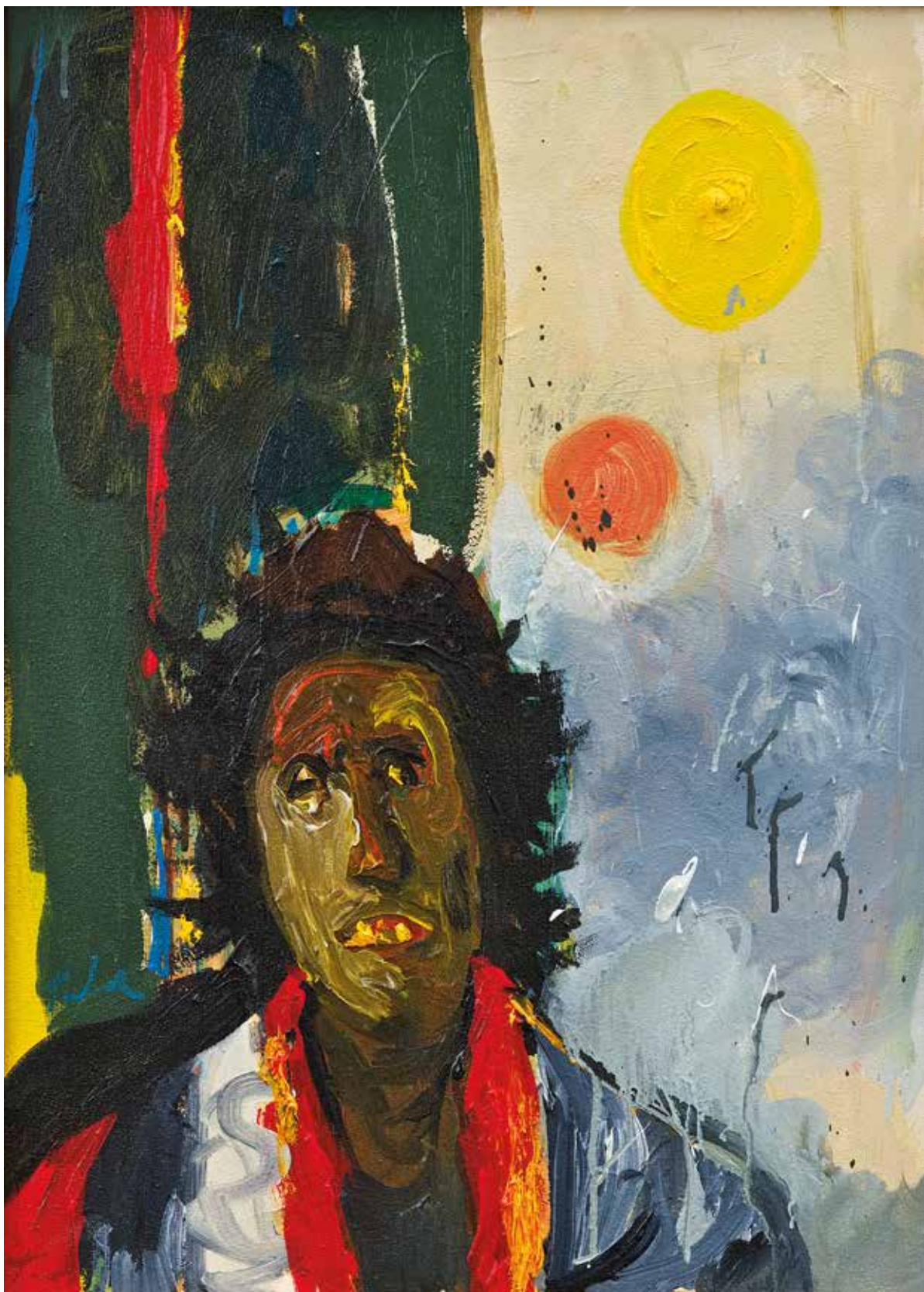


“Vucji Do – 11h”, oil on canvas, 200x231cm, 1987

portrayed person in facial features, but in the inner experience the person was going through, in the way he felt the personality and revealed it to others as an artist. According to his own testimony, he does not work according to a model, but according to his memory where the character is preserved – however, the accuracy of the distribution of the lines and the facial mass is not saved there and this is somewhat different from what Pierre Bonnard<sup>56</sup> did. It is a debt owed to the modern idea of the painting which, due to the appearance of photography in the mid-nineteenth century, has taken on other characteristics.

<sup>56</sup> “So, you never paint according to a motif?”

“Yes, I paint but I abandon it, check in on it, return to it, then return again; I do not allow the object to obsess me completely.” *Pierre Bonnard, conversation with Angela Lama.*



"Danilo Kis", oil on canvas, 40x70cm, 2006

Through relationships of form and colour, by confronting the figurative and the abstract, Todorovic makes changes in the symbolic and semantic, whilst respecting the syntax of his own visual language. A typical example is the portrait of Danilo Kis, which was created according to Todorovic's memories of this author. We cannot talk here about any close encounters with Kis because, according to Todorovic's testimony, none took place – instead, Todorovic created an image of the artist on his own. He remembered what he had heard Dado Djuric say in an anecdote about Kis and a violin. He experienced Kis as dishevelled as he was, not only as a personality but also as a character; he incorporated him into an imaginary landscape, setting his inner personality opposite two red and faded yellow balls. In this painting all the characteristics of Todorovic's approach, not only to portrait painting, but to his entire artistic credo, are present.

By reducing character traits, Todorovic opens up a space to bring into the painting the characteristics which he carries within. One can precisely feel if the person "portrayed" in it breathes with a positive or negative charge. It is, at the same time, evidence of the constant re-examination of what he feels inside and around him. Everything is, as he says, "constantly open".

The paintings from the series *"Memory"* are mostly associated with friezes painted on the same foundation layer, but there are also some that are independent and can be displayed horizontally while not losing any of their characteristics. The compositional solutions are close to the paintings in *"Relations II"* by virtue of a number of common elements. While deepening the series *"Memory"*, the paintings eventually divide the space into two separate units: a segment that develops vertically and is framed by a cassette tape, and a segment in which portraits of an emphasised personality exist. As if on a film tape, a belt with portraits moves, occupying sometimes the left and sometimes the right side. While the faces in the first phase of the *"Memory"* series were colourfully defined in the same way as in *"Relations II"* and partly in Todorovic's earliest series *"Faces"* – the second entity is light; it absorbs the belt around and into itself and builds an abstract event at the same time. There occurs a delineation, where one line shows the characters he has arranged and resolved as portraits – often resembling steles, surrounded by frames that Todorovic had previously used, while others represent an independent visual unit. Such a compositional scheme can be found in other paintings where, by using thick coloured layers, he insists on tactile values. A separate entity is formed by "belts" which do not participate in the development of the painting content, but live independently, referring to figures that caused a reaction in him, thus influencing the characteristics of the series *"Memory"*.

The borders between the series *"Faces"*, *"Relations II"* and *"Memory"* are not sharply delineated – by moving from one into the next, they extend the poetics, thus opening the possibility for the units to act freely and not be trapped within strictly defined limits. So, the painting "behaves without restraint", which is entirely enabled by the



“Memory”, oil on canvas, 195x131cm, 2004



“Memory”, oil on canvas, 195x131cm, 2004



"Scenes", oil on canvas, 110x90cm, 1980

artist's dishevelled temperament that apparently opens up the motif in a reflexive way. It is true that Todorovic is dishevelled, but there is no coincidence in the way he approaches the figure. Everything is known before he starts the act of presenting the motif on either canvas or sheet of paper.

The figure, as well as the portrait, occupies a significant position in Todorovic's creativity. They had already appeared during his school phase – first in the drawings and later on in the paintings of the “*Relations*” and “*Scenes*” series, thus continuing the development in Todorovic's creativity up to the present day. Forms of human figures go through various transformations, so that form in the “*Vucji Do*” series is dominant. Ever since that time, the changes in figures have been minor, particularly in the schematisation of the body and face, as well as in the position which shifts slightly, depending on the content. Of course, the figure is at its most robust in the “*Vucji Do*” series, since the subject matter of this epic cycle required this.

The paintings from the series “*Relations/Scenes*” feature expressive charges of pronounced dark colours that define the complete thematic layer, as Pavle Vasic rightly noted. In approaching the epics of “*Vucji Do*”, the line of the human figure begins on the oil on canvas “*Scene*” (1980). It should be noted that the painting dating from 1980 shows the merging of the profile portrait with the headless body – a feature that would be emphasised to the extreme in the “*Vucji Do*” series.

In the series “*Sole Mio*”, Todorovic is occupied by another phenomenon – man's powerlessness over the forces that symbolically accompany natural disasters. This series should be read also as a set of images of disasters, whether these were caused by men or by nature, which performed this with Todorovic's help. The figures appearing on these canvases mainly occupy the same positions of a contorted human body that is floating. Such solutions can be found also in other series, especially in “*Relations II*”.

The series “*View*” does not belong to the above approach – this series requires another experience from the figures, one that is determined by a different painting dynamic. This is not the dynamic of the “*Vucji Do*”, nor is it the stillness of “*Relations/Scenes*” or “*Sole Mio*”. Its traces cannot be found in the later series “*Adam and Eve*”, where he returned the way the figure is displayed to the line initiated in “*Relations*” and “*Scenes*”. It must be noted that the search for poses for human figures in “*Adam and Eve*” was present in certain paintings of the “*Relations II*” series, in which Todorovic examined a thematic layer which was to be embodied in “*Sole Mio*” and especially in the “*Adam and Eve*” series.

The development in colouristic treatment from “*Faces*”, “*Relations*”, “*Scenes*”, through “*Carrion/Beasts*”, “*Relations II*” and “*Sole Mio*” to “*Adam and Eve*” mark the colouristic content that concerned Todorovic during his research. It received its



"Relations", oil on canvas, 110x90cm, 1980



“Sole Mio”, comb. technique, 131x161cm, 2004

final echo in *“Adam and Eve”*; it is an echo that builds up during the dark treatment of *“Relations/Scenes”*; it is a different resonance than in *“Carrion/Beasts”*, a fuller tactile value than the one that loomed in *“Relations II”* and has a greater power than the one in *“View”*. In *“Adam and Eve”* the non-paint materials that were used in the *“Memory”*, *“View”* and *“Relations II”* series are gone, and their role is taken over by heavy layers of pure paint applied directly from the tube. The colour is now nervous, explosive and glowing; it reflects the internal dynamics of this series.

LANDSCAPE is the main motif in the typological definition of the series *“Krnovo”*, *“Terra Terabilita”* and *“Mediterranean”*. The paintings in these units are “liberated” from the presence of the figure, except for the appearance of two cypresses in *“Mediterranean”*, which may be experienced in some paintings of this series as the figures of a loving couple – a detail that would be, much later, emphasised in the paintings of the *“Adam and Eve”* series, in which the loving couple is in a symbiosis



"Relations II", oil on canvas, 100x80cm, 2000



“Relations II”, oil on canvas, 135x150cm, 2000

with a pair of cypresses. Now the composition deals with other phenomena and the figures disappear, swallowed by a playfulness of colour that initiates abstract representations of events. There remain traces of forms and legible symbols, especially the cross, on whose symbolic value Todorovic insisted. It radiates its symbolic message in accordance with the manner in which the cross is interwoven into the proceedings.

The series “*Sole Mio*”, “*View*” and “*Adam and Eve*” brought back the figure into the painting, but now it was changed and associated with scenery, which had not been there before. The number and selection of poses was certainly reduced but this is compensated for by the intensity of colour and the firmness of the existential layer which, regardless of its homogeneity, leaves open the possibility for further research.



“Relations II”, oil on canvas, 120x140cm, 2001

In “*Vucji Do*” the figure speeds up and calms the proceedings, while in “*Adam and Eve*” he left it to the surroundings to perform this action.

Through **PORTRAIT**, **FIGURE** and **LANDSCAPE** we can follow the defining of Todorovic’s lines with regard to its changes. The drawing in “*Scenes*” and “*Relations*” is emphasised with a strong black line that separates forms and defines the shape in a firmer manner. In “*Vucji Do*” there occurs a moving on, so that the black line blends the contour of the figure into the background, while in “*Adam and Eve*” it disappears, replaced by touches of coloured masses. In this manner, Todorovic brought the function of his line to an end. “The line is the boundary between two forms”, noted Edgar Degas but forms can also be formed in a soft way, while not losing their expressiveness.

As far as shape and colour values are concerned, Todorovic's painting ranges from the dark colours present in "*Relations*" and "*Scenes*", to a higher, ebullient register in "*Carrion*" and "*Beasts*". The colouristic and objective structure is finally established in "*Vucji Do*", with rich coloured applications and playful figures that move in a variety of poses. That is where the Path appeared and the artist follows it by introducing fresh vigour into his research.

And finally, in the "*Adam and Eve*" series, all that Todorovic studied through his entire oeuvre is present, primarily the relation between form and colour. The colouristic and figurative definitions of "*Adam and Eve*" can be already implied in certain paintings in "*Relations II*" where the interest turns to new challenges that finally materialise in the last series. Parallels in experiences are the constants on which Todorovic has insisted the most – that is, these processes have not been completed and are to continue.



"Sole Mio", comb. technique, 135x155cm, 2002

# V PERIODS IN RAJKO TODOROVIC'S PAINTING

**P**ERIODS represent a timeline that accompany the colouristic contents and thematic patterns of the paintings created by Rajko Todorovic. In them, the visual scheme develops to its final determination. Certain **PERIODS** brush against each other, others overlap, while different visual processes are separated from others through typological planes – although they took place in the same time period, one process was not yet fully completed when the other one was beginning.

The **PERIOD 1977–1983** covers the time when he completed his studies and began his independent research. That was when the series “*Faces*”, “*Relations*” and “*Scenes*” were created. The earliest works were the portraits from the “*Faces*” series through which he was searching for a visual pattern in his painting and determination of the colouristic and thematic layer. Next were the series “*Scenes*” and “*Relations*” which form a “unique aesthetic, formal and conceptual-intellectual unity”<sup>57</sup>, i.e. they belong to an expressive compositional set, immersed in a dark tone.

Todorovic’s colour has to be observed from the very beginning as a cohesive factor that determines the internal state of the painting. “The colour itself is expressive; we cannot be deprived of it and we have to make use of it – that which is beautiful is at the same time also true.”<sup>58</sup> Todorovic felt this maxim of Van Gogh’s and clung to it all through his creative work. Any change in the thematic layer introduces additional features in his palette, especially those required by the atmosphere of the composition. In his student-era works we feel that form and colour also determine the psychophysical mood and artistic quality. “When colour reaches affluence the form is at its most complete”, Cézanne pointed out, and Todorovic found this object lesson in himself, in his experiences and visual memories of the artworks of the great masters from all periods.

Pavle Vasic accurately noted the features from “*Scenes*” and “*Relations*” thus linking Todorovic’s paintings more to “our local level, rather than a universal one”.<sup>59</sup> In them, the colour is “suppressed” and pulled out of the lower dark register – this suited his feelings and was reflected in his approach and search for artistic identity. The path to individual poetics is always full of challenges, which Todorovic does not run away from.

<sup>57</sup> According to Ljiljana Zekovic

<sup>58</sup> Van Gogh, *Letters to Theo*

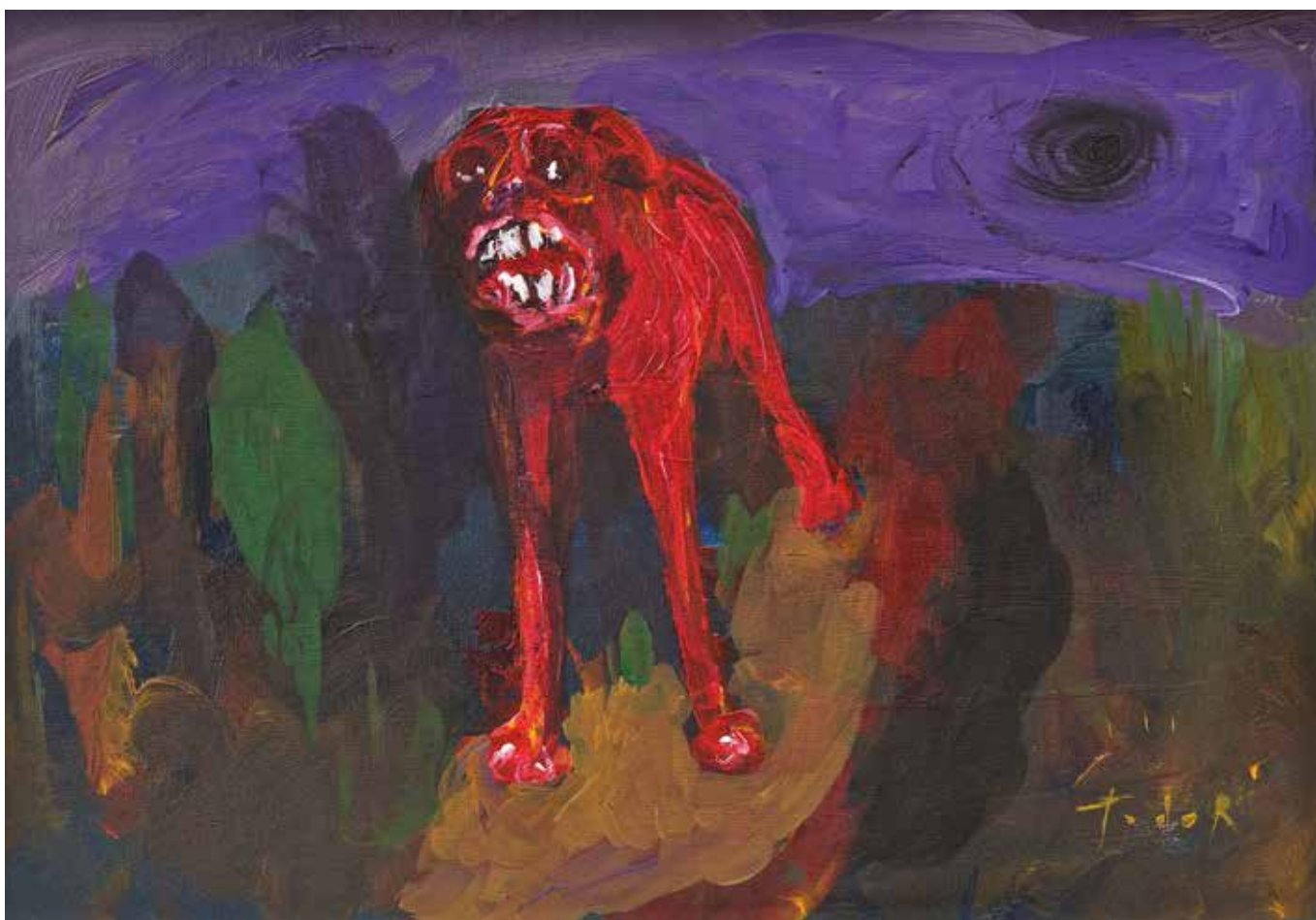
<sup>59</sup> Pavle Vasic, “Generacija 9”, *Politika*, 1980.



“Scenes”, drawing, 30x44cm, 1978

In his early works he used black expressive lines. As this period approached its end, the line began to fade away and disappear while the forms began to determine the colouristic masses. The basic patterns of this period were a dark palette, expressive half-figure and figure.

The **PERIOD 1984–1988** began with the series “*Beasts*” and “*Carrion*”, in which the colouristic pattern and treatment of forms changed. In Todorovic’s approach we cannot specify the exact time of the unfolding of the series, since he did not use these exclusively as a thematic pattern, but through them he deepened the existential layer of the painting. Thus, the changes started in one series continue their processes into the next one. The painting in “*Beasts*” and “*Carrion*” “erupted”, carried by a powerful sound from the upper colouristic scale, suggesting thus the epopee of “*Vucji Do*”, which he fitted into the event through a number of paintings. He was not interested in the development of the events, but focused on his personal experience – the experience kept in his perception since his earliest childhood, when he absorbed it from the stories he listened to and interpreted them in his sincere manner by placing the tragic event in the foreground and not its epic contour. Research in the symbolic



“Beasts”, oil on cardboard, 35x50cm, 1984

plane suggests colouristic and formal categories that are primarily treated by this existential visual unit. The space of the painting acquires a different function that is not broken with geometric plans. “*Carrion*”, cut into pieces, outgrows the framework in which it was located – this is noticeable also in the “hot and passionate” experience in the red and white “*Beasts*”.

The further deepening of the colourful “*Vucji Do*” indicates the dual use of coloured deposits and form. Consequently, two or more separate units appear in the paintings – ones that belong to the realm of the figurative and others that belong to an abstract visual content. In these paintings there are no geometrised cassettes, in which the events are separated – by merging with each other they form a whole.

He felt that a large number of figures in the “*Vucji Do*” had to be arranged so as not to disturb the basic typological scheme. This process was preceded by a colourist symbiosis of “*Scenes*” and “*Relations*” with “*Beasts*” and “*Carrion*”, which opened up a new thematic layer. If we compare the human figure in “*Scenes/Relations*” with those of the “*Vucji Do*”, we note that a change began with the painting “*Scene*” in

which a head is floating above a headless body. Colour is coming out from the dark registry, carried by the background of colouristic sound that is geometrically folded. In the painting *"Vučji Do"* the geometrical division of space is replaced by "dispersed" resonant colour. In *"Carrion"* (1985) certain solutions which would stand out in all their fullness in *"Vučji Do"* are indicated. The head of *"Carrion"* has been cut off but is still not completely separated from the torso. In the same painting, on a bloody, red mat there is another animal head that has clear portrait values, with which Todorovic was engaged in *"Faces"*. The permanent connection between one period and the next is present throughout all phases of his work. It is not evident but is clearly noted in this case, as well as in later cases. In many paintings the spaces of *"Vučji Do"* are conquered by green colour, which is not that common in Montenegrin painting – besides being a realistic layer, this colour has also a symbolic layer, one of which is that green stands for Islam. In determining the poetics of this series, one must point out that



"Carrion", oil on canvas, 130x150cm, 1985



“Vucji Do – 12:34h”, oil on canvas, 203x231cm, 1987

Todorovic was not interested in the course of the battle or in some of its fragments, but he indicates a sense of tragedy, which is woven into his entire oeuvre. The series “*The Battle at Vucji Do*” presented this in the most outstanding way possible.

The indicated and solved visual problems of the “*Vucji Do*” series are versatile and they indicate how the symbol and its symbolic determination became part of the strong colouring which brings the painting to an ecstasy through a colouristic explosion. Todorovic’s landscape should not be observed as a separate and independent unit, but as a symbolic colouristic content defined by red and green.<sup>60</sup> When it comes to the feeling for the Mediterranean, we must note that Todorovic does not belong only to the

<sup>60</sup> As Todorovic said: “Evil emerges from the soil! Layers of evil have accumulated in it!”

Montenegrin artistic identity, which is reflected in colours and the defining of forms, but also to all those currents that depend on strong colouristic charge, as well as on the expressive figurative/subject approach and abstract expression. More precisely: he is not subject exclusively to the view that belongs to the surroundings from which he originated – he has “immersed” his work also into the stimuli that have come and are coming from other areas of the global visual environment.

**THE PERIOD 1991–2001** is determined by the series “*Krnovo*”, “*Terra Terabilita*” and the “*Mediterranean*” which were created between 1991 and 2001. They should be observed as landscapes extracted from a layer of visual memories and aspirations for a colouristic and symbolic set-up of the visual presentation. This period marks a thematic step forward, out of the visual-pattern form and is clearly linked to his early visual memories, especially



“Vucji Do – 19:30h”, oil on canvas, 203x251cm, 1987

those of landscapes from his childhood and adolescence that are deeply fixed in his mind. These landscapes also penetrated the series *“Krnovo”*, *“Terra Terabilita”* and *“Mediterranean”*, enriched with new experiences and the appearance of abstract and new structural and colouristic solutions. Todorovic’s visual memory certainly kept its memory of the bitter colouring of Emil Nolde, whose paintings he had seen at the Museum of Modern Art<sup>61</sup> in Belgrade, as well as the atmosphere of El Greco’s paintings, as indicated by Ljiljana Zekovic. In the paintings of this series we can notice the absence of the figure, which had been a faithful companion in Todorovic’s compositions. This is the most significant difference that is not repeated in the following blocks. The study of landscape and combination of abstract and figurative experience in the painting represent a summary of experiences and a preparation of the ground for the next breakthrough. Particularly important is the role of shapes, mostly crosses, as an integral part of these presentations. The bond was not completely interrupted, as it is evident in the colours of *“Krnovo”* (1991–1992) and *“Terra Terabilita”* (1993–1994), primarily in the green basic tone which appeared in *“Vucji Do”* and the drama present in *“Carrion/Beasts”* which was later deepened in *“Vucji Do”*. An agitated and tense atmosphere, as before a storm, brings the painting in *“Mediterranean”* (2001) to boiling point. He places two cypresses, which are repeated from painting to painting, into the composition, thus metaphorically representing the figures of a pair of lovers in a lyrical ecstasy which calms the tempestuous situation. Forms are subordinated to colour and radiate a different visual refraction, thus indicating the appearance of traces of an abstract way of thinking of the painting.

The answer to the question of what the processes are that occurred in the series *“Krnovo”* (1991), *“Terra Terabilita”* (1993–1994) and *“Mediterranean”* (2001), is that the form was reduced from the recognisable to the associative, thus enabling the painting to enter the field of abstract refraction. With the use of symbols, the conflicts of the colours within the green basic tone express hidden symbolic contents. Here, it refers to a landscape that receives its closer definition only in the paintings of the *“Mediterranean”* series<sup>62</sup>, in which recognition is growing, as abstract association is substituted by defined forms of treetops and the chaos of a storm. Instead of green, we now encounter a blue basic tone that gives a particular sound to the painting. The roughness of *“Krnovo”* and *“Terra Terabilita”* is replaced by the tumultuous rhythm of *“Mediterranean”*.

Through colour, these series express a feeling which is never neutral, but “burns” in flames which rise from the core, carried by internal experience. The emotion that “sparked” in *“Krnovo”* and *“Terra Terabilita”* and had its dark counterpart in

<sup>61</sup> Emil Nolde, exhibition, Museum of Modern Art, Belgrade, 20 December 1978–15 February 1979.

<sup>62</sup> Ljiljana Zekovic: ‘In the series MEDITERRANEAN (2001) he brings optimism in his paintings with associative and abstract connotations. Starting from the unsettled atmosphere of El Greco’s *Toledo* and Van Gogh’s cypresses, “the messengers of death” which rise to the sky like black phantoms, through a gestured and colouristic expression, he introduces acoustic chords of red and yellow into the darkness of despair, thus “composing” warm symphonies dedicated to the vitality and cheerfulness of the Mediterranean environment’, Rajko Todorovic Todor, Retrospective exhibition catalogue, p 61, Centre of Modern Art of Montenegro, Podgorica, 2005.

**“Mediterranean”** replaced its colouristic explosions of raw colour with darkness and bitterness. The absence of the figure and the dramatic communication with colour, which were the main features of this period, conditioned the change in the thematic pattern, thus emphasising a different compositional scheme.

I asked myself this question: was the change that occurs in **“Krnovo”**, **“Terra Terabilita”** and **“Mediterranean”** dictated by the replacement of oil colours by acrylics, or is it the artist’s nerve which is now inclining towards the dramatic arrangement of a different experience of the world? The answer is hovering around somewhere and I believe that the “dictating” is not in any technological change, but in the artist’s visual nerve. In addressing my dilemma, Todorovic briefly said that technological change did not affect the content in the painting solution.

Colouristic variations are present in Todorovic’s oeuvre through all its stages. From the calm and almost extinguished palette during the late nineteen-seventies, all the way through a nervous forcing of coloured conflicts and the painting construction in multi-layered spreads; “the Path is long”, as Todorovic would say, but it is definitely not completed. The colouristic poetic changes and the movement toward an abstract organisation of the landscape composition assume a new sound in the series **“Terra Terabilita”**, that is, the fireworks colouristically melt into vaguely defined forms. He applies accents of chrome-yellow, streaked with various shades of ochre on a basic green tone. On some of them a rough red form has carved out a central place. A nervous colour dispersal is also notable, which makes the experience more dynamic. This refers to a change in colour and removal of the figure, that is, the removal of factors that are organically linked to Todorovic’s earlier paintings in **“Scenes”**, **“Relations”**, **“Beasts”** and **“Carrion”**. Regardless of the relaxed attitude emanating from the canvas, nothing is left to chance – everything, by some strange logic, had to happen this way.

Observed from the aspect of colour, the series **“Krnovo”**, **“Terra Terabilita”** and **“Mediterranean”** directly followed what had been adopted in **“Vucji Do”**, while the wide range of colour palette, after something of a colouristic ecstasy, became calm. The explosion that could have been expected after **“Vucji Do”** was replaced by an abstract expression, evident in **“Krnovo”**, where a powerful colouristic sound is induced by alternating light and dark partitions, intersected by strong coloured accents. The search for the right sound continued in **“Terra Terabilita”**, so that a fusion with the palette used in **“Vucji Do”** took place in **“Mediterranean”**. In this way, the change of motif introduced the colouristic adventure to calmer waters. In the opus **“Mediterranean”**, Todorovic approached a general review of his previous work. He did not do it cautiously but vigorously, since the intensity of Todorovic’s artistic temperament did not allow a calm response.

**THE PERIOD 1998–2004** includes the series **“Relations II”** (1998–2004) and **“Sole Mio”** (1998–2004) which elaborate on the extended thematic content of half-figures,

figures, busts and faces bringing into balance the colourist and structural plan. The changed viewing angle of *“Relations II”* and *“Sole Mio”* underlines the unity of the existential layer of the painting. The existing thick, coloured spreads which could be discerned in *“Vucji Do”* introduced, through a number of colouristic breakthroughs, a new sound in the series *“Krnovo”* and *“Terra Terabilita”*. This line continued in the series *“Memory”* and *“View”*, reaching a complete sound in the *“Adam and Eve”* paintings which were created after 2009. The canvases in *“Relations II”* emphasise a broader register of symbols and signs by which Todorovic proves that the world of his painting is composed of action as well as of colour and form.

A new approach to painting could begin. Nothing stood in the way any more – not even the tight and inert hand, which moved carefully while shaping the experience or fear of colouristic confrontation and the breaking up of colourful thematic content. The path was broken, the tunnel lit and the game was heating up in search of thematic characteristics and the experience of shape and colour. He was not looking for a theme. He felt that it would turn up by itself, that it would break through out of somewhere in his interior, as occurred in the epic series *“Vucji Do”*, when the artist focused his view on the world around him, observing it as it was reflected in his soul.

Further development caused the moving of content in which were the beginnings of successive studies in the series *“Sole Mio”* and which would erupt in *“Adam and Eve”*. Some paintings clearly indicate this, such as those where we see a contorted figure with bent knees. The appearance of forms presented in this manner was evident already in *“Vucji Do”*, while it was to form as a symbol in the series *“Sole Mio”*. One or two standing figures began to be positioned in *“Relations II”*, continuing from there on to *“Adam and Eve”*. The unity of Todorovic’s painting philosophy has been nurtured from the very beginning and has passed through all the series to his latest works.

The beginning of the series *“Sole Mio”* was thematically shy and turned towards a colouristic whirlpool that was swallowing everything up. The main event takes place at the epicentre of a solar spinning wheel, which sucks in human figures in various poses, as well as other content (parts of skeletons, bones of the hands, verticals, crosses and crucifixes).<sup>63</sup> When the spirals on his paintings<sup>64</sup> reach a dizzying speed then a radiation starts that generates a colouristic swirl of complicated symbolic structures. That is when the throwing of entire figures out from the epicentre begins – their life continues in a

<sup>63</sup> Ljiljana Zekovic precisely analysed it in this way: “Concentrated archetypal and symbolic connotations (...) dominated by a spiral that forms a heliocentric system of concentric circles. His sun is matter and emptiness, a core of both positive and negative energy, a place (...). The sun is not dehumanised, but represents a space in which signs of microcosmic transience are imprinted (...) In this series of personal testimonies, Todor not only virtually, as in previous series, but also visually united microcosmic and cosmic spaces.” Rajko Todorovic Todor, Retrospective exhibition catalogue, Centre of Modern Art of Montenegro, Podgorica, 2005.

<sup>64</sup> In the drawings created between 2006 and 2008 in the series *“Sole Mio”* the thematic content was expanded, thus enriching the painting that carried it.



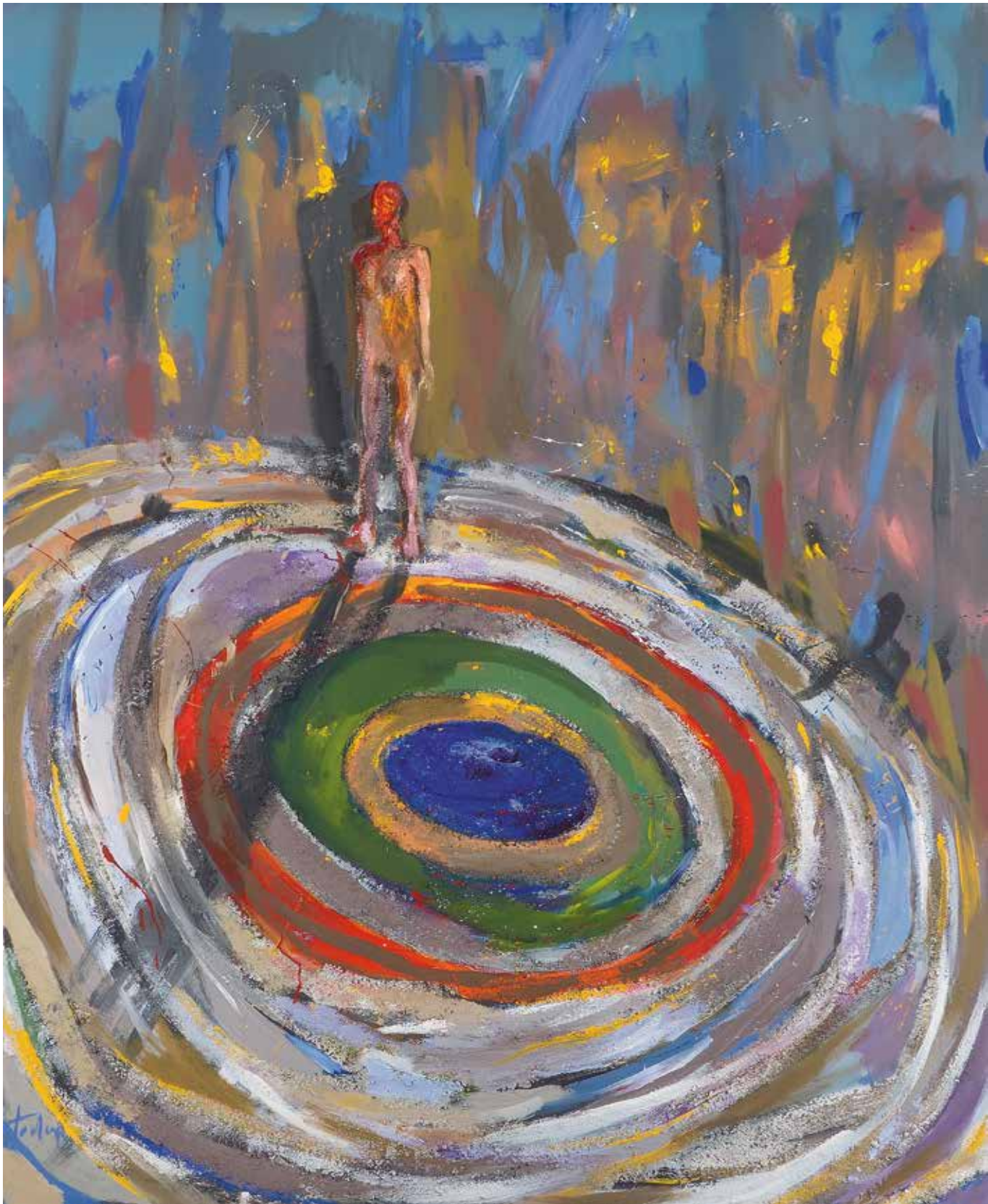
“Sole Mio”, oil on canvas, 131x161cm, 2004

new way within the second typological pattern. The circle becomes part of the event in which the action takes place between figures and the turbulent whirlpool. The pulling of figures out to the edge of the whirlpool indicates the end of one adventure and the beginning of the following one: the whirlpool continues its dance, pointing to the dark crater of the colourfully playful spirals in the depth; this is observed with interest by a person who is a former participant in the action in the epicentre. In this way the variety of the symbolic level is broadened. Todorovic uses the dynamics obtained by circular motion to expand the register with a number of new colouristic and thematic directions.

**THE PERIOD 2004–2011**, with its thematic blocks “*Memory*”, “*View*” and “*Adam and Eve*” indicated Todorovic’s need to work simultaneously on two or more series. He did this impulsively, pulling out of himself hidden content and transferring it to the canvas where it took on its own external life. When he encountered a phenomenon that particularly excited him, he put it into the painting and left it to fit into a process which at that point



“Sole Mio”, comb. technique, 200x155cm, 2005



"Sole Mio", comb. technique, 210x180cm, 2006

was not the subject of the artist's interest. He had no time to wait, but painted a painting in a new typological key, since he felt that he was too impatient and that this must happen immediately. Sometimes he returned to a series on which he had been working previously and continued the work on it as if he had never stopped! Sometimes he became excited by a number of phenomena, which he immediately implemented, leaving them to continue on their own. These interventions did not overwhelm the presentation nor did they have an influence on the process that was interrupted for a moment, but they opened up opportunities which intensified his current work and pointed out new directions of research.

The series *"Memory"*, which was begun in 2004, was created in memory of the people who had passed through Todorovic's life and crossed it in the most different ways. It is evident, too, that the composition solutions are close to those of the paintings from the series *"Relations II"*.

It is evident that in *"View"*, Todorovic's next series, there occurred a compression of the earlier blocks – *"Faces"*, *"Scenes"*, *"Sole Mio"*, *"Memory"* and, to some extent, *"Krnovo"* and *"Terra Terabilita"*. These trends continued in *"Adam and Eve"*, in which a closer tie with *"Mediterranean"* (2001) was expressed, especially in paintings that are completed with human figures.

In *"View"* a stronger introduction of tactile values is present, which make the colouristic impression stronger. The roughness of the coloured sediment becomes a kind of Braille that extends the view through touches with the fingertips. While the *"Memory"* series (until 2004) determined the portrait theme of *"Faces"* in a profound way, in the meantime, *"View"* (around 2006) broadened the thematic unit of the figure by speeding up the rhythm through the horizontal directions of movement of visual forces, which in diagonal refractions influence the change of "speed" in the painting. Everything is in motion – figures that "rush" over the horizontals and diagonals and transform the background into a variable, just as in "moving pictures".

Such visual developments are also present in the drawings belonging to the same thematic block. Whether the drawings in *"View"* precede the paintings or the paintings precede the drawings, it is difficult to say. It is not essential to determine this, but it is necessary to point out that the paintings and drawings follow the same developmental path, thus forming series that pervade each other and form harmonious units. It must be noted that in the drawings there are a small number of compositional dilemmas. The only visual outings are rare colouristic accents on particular sheets of paper. The thematic pattern of *"View"* was present in Todorovic's research for a long time. Its roots can be found in the drawings created at the end of the nineteen-seventies and they continued to appear in the paintings of *"Memory"* (until 2004) and *"View"* (around 2006). While the series *"Memory"* determines *"Faces"* in a new way, *"View"* broadens the thematic whole.



Drawing, ink, comb. technique, 27,5x39cm, 1979

The paintings of the series *“Adam and Eve”* (2009–2011) are anything but calm. More precisely, they represent an even more powerful continuation of the quests in progress; the rhythm is now determined by colouristic explosions of thick spreads of clean and resonant colour of a higher, hot register which are applied with a spatula, knife, wooden sculpture tool, brush and other means.<sup>65</sup> The spreads of colour are much thicker than they had been up to that point and have a different quality than those that preceded it in *“View”*.

He typically transfers into each new series the experiences gained through progress in order to summarise them now in a new feeling of the painting that is typologically and colourfully firmly established. From one series to the next, Todorovic expanded the physiognomy of the presentation, introducing differently treated basic elements – line, colour, form and content.

<sup>65</sup> In the final paragraph of the article “The Value of Individual Mythology” in the catalogue for the solo exhibition of Rajko Todorovic Todor at the National Gallery of Macedonia, Mladen Lompar concluded: ‘In Montenegrin art today we cannot find “a more vehement” painter than Rajko Todorovic, or an artist whose role in its transformation during the eighties was so clear.’ This opinion is not only accurate and precise but also enters deeply into the essential processes occurring on the current art scene of Montenegro. At the same time, it precedes the series “Adam and Eve”. It can be said that it anticipates Todorovic’s further search.

In *“Adam and Eve”* the elements came together, although each of them retained its physiognomy that adapted to the new compositional organisation. These paintings are also landscapes and scenes, as well as wanderings through abstract space. They represent, at the same time, the tightening of these realms as well as their sweeping – depending on the way the artist felt at the moment of its creation. The symbolic plane deals with leaving the Garden of Eden and going east of Eden. Heaven is seen as boring, while real excitement awaits in hell. In Adam and Eve’s memory there would remain what happened prior to their expulsion and this would follow them all through the later anguish that remained woven into human nature.

Todorovic is an impulsive artist. He carries visual stimuli until they explode in him and “spill out” on the canvas. After that there usually follows a calming of the inner instinct, a re-examining of the presentations and their rigorous “cleansing”. From the very beginning “compressions” and “cleansings” are an indispensable part of his approach to painting. After 2006 he brought his painting to a phase where everything could be expected to explode and create a new universe, dictated by his inner artistic feelings of the moment. The explosion would not destroy what he had previously created. On the contrary! However, it is too early for such a conclusion. I do not know what the future of the painter is but I am convinced that even the artist himself does not know this. Todorovic listens in, anticipates and searches through the anticipated, but he is always ready to open up a new line of research and to graft his newly created works on the just-sprouted branch.

It is clear that *“Adam and Eve”* opens up, in a new way, a view on the thematic units of *“Krново”*, *“Terra Terabilita”*, *“Mediterranean”*, *“Sole Mio”* and *“Scenes”*. Various contents are combined into one, so that each retains its own features which are indeed slightly modified and customised. The paintings in *“Adam and Eve”* insist on a strong colour, thus causing a change in the treatment of the figure in space. More precisely: the background plan in which the event takes place is, in fact, a quotation from one of his previous series, but never as a sentimental reminiscence of the past period. Compressions of compositional schemes in *“Scenes”*, *“Krново”*, *“Terra Terabilita”*, *“Mediterranean”* and *“Sole Mio”* are perceived in a, so to speak, special colouristic manner, in which the colour has a bursting sound that is deafening while the flame in it “burns”. The study was initiated in 2009 and extended to 2010 and 2011, the year which was already announcing new visual excitements from Rajko Todorovic.

It is common for an artist in this period of his creative life to become cautious and to have no pronounced tendency for experimentation. The intensity of Todorovic’s temperament does not allow this. He is finished with calm but nonetheless exciting paintings, even with those that he accelerated dynamically (*“Sole Mio”* and *“View”*). An inner calmness was present in everything and Todorovic bid farewell to it in *“Adam and Eve”*. The paintings in *“Adam and Eve”* were anything but calm – they emanated a colourfully heated treatment and a figuratively determined nervous event.



“Krnovo”, oil on cardboard, 41x59cm, 1992

This raises the question: Where was there to go afterwards?

As usually, he would act impulsively.

I say impulsively, rather than rationally. The inner feeling is the one that guides; it is an experience that he carries and which has not yet come up to the surface. He follows his own internal logic that is characterised by research processes which are not, despite the change in direction, unpredictable, but rather they logically result from each other, as a collection of Todorovic’s visual facts. Todorovic’s paintings and drawings require observation through the phenomena that carry them: the figurative and colouristic content, the symbolic level, the drawing and interdependence of their elements. They all have a common atmosphere, regardless of whether they lean on the lyrical or epic side. The periods suggested are frameworks in which the artworks temporally and poetically reside, while overlapping and going further towards illuminating the new phenomena dictated by the artist’s inner need.

# VI FROM LANDSCAPE TO THE SPACE OF PAINTING

Landscape, as an independent motif, appeared at the beginning of Todorovic's reflections on painting<sup>66</sup> and then, later on, in the series *"Krnovo"*, *"Terra Terabilita"* and *"Mediterranean"*. The human figure was removed, thus allowing the landscape to become the object of singular interest. This procedure was important because Todorovic now directed himself towards colouristic masses and their arrangement on the painting. This would yield results in his later works when he introduced the figure onto the canvas once again. In an interview he claimed that landscape, except during his boyhood, was never a theme. This suggests that, perhaps, his interests in the series *"Krnovo"*, *"Terra Terabilita"* and *"Mediterranean"* were not directed towards the landscape, but to the space of the painting where the action – the transposition of the landscape into a new semantic definition – would take place.

Todorovic's space is like a segment of the universe where artistic thinking is materialised. It is, in fact, a space that dwells in his memory, the only place where it really exists. Being artistically modified, it is then transferred to a sheet of paper or a canvas. In certain presentations there are notable tendencies toward the surface, which ignore his sense of volume of form and tendency towards depth, out of which the artist's most intimate reflections appear, adapted to the motif he is investigating. He also expressed this tendency towards the surface verbally in the explanations of his views on El Greco's paintings.

Portrait and landscape are motifs that aroused his interest in his early youth. It was, to some extent, a logical path that the future artist would undergo in his development. The twelve-year old boy focused on landscape as the starting point of the real space of his "art" by recording all the information and colouristic sensations that caught his eye.

In later studies, especially in *"Vucji Do"*, landscape appears exclusively as a space in which an event resides. This is a landscape, but with characteristics of a two-dimensional space. In the series *"Krnovo"*, *"Terra Terabilita"* and *"Mediterranean"* the situation is somewhat different. Here, space equals landscape, and Todorovic has pulled it out from his memories of the scenery of Niksic. In them, the landscape is tucked away in space and waiting for the moment to come up to the surface and triumph over the event imposed by the occurrences on the canvas.

<sup>66</sup> "Ostroska greda", oil on cardboard, 1964.



"Beasts", aquarelle, 24x36cm, 1984

In "*Carrion*" and "*Beasts*", real space is determined by the event and its symbolic plane, which influences the fact that the colouristic content is defined in various ways. In the watercolour "*Carrion*" (1978) f. the space has two plans. One plan is caught on the paper and the other one is a symbolic intervention. When united, these two spaces make the event complete. In the Indian ink drawing (1980), the space contains two segments. One space shows, in the background, a television screen that broadcasts the carrion's skull and the other screen shows two interlocutors. The two spaces incorporated into one, as well as the two series united into a single unit, clearly present the action on the paper and the artist's reflections on the forming of units. The space of the oil on the canvas f. represents a butchered "*Carrion*" placed in three spots. The dismembered body and two cut-off heads in a geometrically bordered area form the main plot, which expresses all the tragedy of the act on a red background. In order to connect this with the other space, he set up a rectangular red plan in a frame, which is a separate entity, almost an abstract composition, incorporated into a figurative experience. It is an indication of Todorovic's later abstract breakthroughs, but also of a connection with Lubarda. The artist says that the rectangle in his approach should be always seen as a coffin, which in this case deepens and strengthens the symbolic link between the fragmented body (= death) and the space in which the event is located.



“Relations”, drawing comb. technique, 18x21,5cm, 1980

So, in order to avoid the feeling of everything “hanging over”, the white plan borders against the blue one, thus contributing to a documentary view of the events. This kind of layout of elements is common in Todorovic’s paintings; in this way he emphasises the spatial and geometrical as well as the colouristic encounter.

When one compares these visual sensations with the visual events in the series “**Vucji Do**” the connection opens up even more apparently; it is as if the painter is preparing to enter the solution of an epic event in which a painting-in-a-painting is placed – the flag as an independent event, as Mica Popovic<sup>67</sup> points out.

<sup>67</sup> “Todor does not blur (or at least not too often) the thematic layer with pseudo-literary or pseudo- philosophical witticisms. His artistic statement is pure and direct – a happy juncture of childlike innocence and professional mastery”, Mica Popovic, in the exhibition catalogue RAJKO TODOROVIC TODOR, Centre of Modern Art of Montenegro, Podgorica, 2005.



"Beasts", comb. technique, 52x42cm, 2009

The series *“Beasts”* mainly takes place in an area divided into several spaces. A red animal with sharp, bared white teeth is surrounded by an expressive, colourfully “extinguished” landscape. Above is the sky in a dark violet spread and with a symbolic shape – a black ball. There is an indefinite space around the animal; it is reminiscent of the landscape, but also has the characteristics of an abstract content. The painting has all the elements of an expressive procedure and its starting point is as much in the northern version as it is in those feelings that belong to the Balkan region, with passages of pure colouristic abstraction. In the red *“Beast”*, Todorovic primarily solved colouristic dilemmas that were to develop in paintings of *“Vucji Do”*, through which he thematically determined the epic event; this helped him avoid going into a pathos which often accompanies epic themes.

A similar process occurs on the canvas of the white *“Beast”*, where spaces determined by an internal colouristic unit form their own special experiences. There is a major colouristic difference between these two paintings, that is, between the two beasts – the path from dark to light or from light to dark, by means of which Todorovic often breaks up the monotony which threatens to sneak into these paintings. This continues in *“Beast”* (1983) where he resolves one of the presentations in a combined technique and the other one in watercolours. In the series *“Beasts”*, the strongest features are the expressive charges, which are fervent – these can be seen only in the paintings of the “fiercest” Expressionist painters who used their colour palette in this manner. Similar determinations of real space are also encountered in Todorovic’s other paintings of the *“Scenes/Relations”* and *“Sole Mio”* series.

The case of the thematic block *“Vucji Do”*, Todorovic’s fundamental visual research, is somewhat different. The connection between the paintings, the logic of their appearance and the method of approaching space and the palette is a visual direction of events towards structural problems. Through a new deepening of directions he transposed them into a completely different quality.

Those artworks created after 2008 have a different resonance; in them he investigated the subject matter by binding it to tests that arose from the series as a separate block. It is possible to look at this short-lived phase as a refinement of the inventory accumulated in *“Faces”*, but also as an experiment which determined the space in a new way. Although within the framework of **PORTRAITS** the *“Memory”* block is small in terms of numbers, it is, nevertheless, visually the most complex. He divided the composition into two separate experiences. In one of them his vision was turned towards the heads of nameless figures on whose faces we sense both tragedy and calmness. In the second section he emphasised the colouring, which is completely torn away from the faces that are most frequently placed in vertical friezes, around which he formed a coloured explosion which is close to colouristic abstraction. The palette gains a stronger, sometimes even exaggerated, resonance while the composition in space is completely subordinated to the new requirements.



“Beasts”, gouache, 23x24cm, 1983

Todorovic’s most recent series uses all the former solutions of landscape, space and “wild colours” which in the *“Adam and Eve”* series acquired a final form that derived from all the artist’s previous quests. Here space and landscapes are compacted and they form an environment in which two figures reside.

The line of Todorovic’s research from landscape towards space, and from space towards landscape, with egressions into abstract structures is obvious. They suggest that he does not allow either landscape or space to prevail, but uses both as required by the events within the thematic scale, where in one moment it is the space that prevails and in another it is the landscape.

# VII PAINTING-IN-A-PAINTING

Throughout his complete oeuvre, Rajko Todorovic has followed a special, but not emphatically obvious, approach that can be classified under the entry “a painting-in-a-painting”. It is a way of visual thinking that builds on to the relationship of the figurative – the abstract problem-solving of the painting. This is present from his very beginnings in the **period 1977–1986** and extends to part of the **period 2008–2011**. This way of composing paintings can be interpreted as the artist’s constant hesitation between figurative and abstract resolutions of the composition; however, abstract composition never overcame the figurative one, to which Todorovic is inextricably linked. It is most probable that it was a conscious examination of the intertwining of two ways of using forms and colours. There is an evident hesitation about whether to separate sensations or bind them together and let them exist together, thus defining the “painting-in-a-painting” – that is, a painting with an autonomy of components within the unity of the visual event on the canvas.

This started with “*Scenes*”, “*Relations*” and “*Faces*” and was most obviously reflected in the paintings of “*Relations II*” and the series “*Memory*”. It can be concluded that it was created by compressing two sensations – the expressionist form and the space of its existence, which is resolved by an emphasised abstract colouristic sensation. These paintings make me think that these colouristically abstract passages were drawn from Todorovic’s feelings for El Greco’s works. At one time Aldous Huxley wrote: “I am very sorry that El Greco did not experience the old age of Titian. At the age of eighty or ninety he could have created abstract art – Cubism without cubes, organic, purely visceral. What paintings those would have been! Wonderful, exciting paintings – horrifying to the core”.<sup>68</sup>

Does there exist an internal link between Todorovic and El Greco? – this remains at the level of my assumptions which arise from personal readings of this Montenegrin artist’s oeuvre which I observe as being “organic, visceral, exciting – paintings horrifying to the core”. Here one should turn to Goethe once again, who highlighted the drawing out of solutions from the artist’s memory and reminiscences. This should not be linked to the taking over of ready-made solutions, but as a conversion through internal visual sensitivity. There exists an interaction between the visually experienced

<sup>68</sup> Maurice Barres, “El Greco or the Secret of Toledo”, Alef, Gradac, Cacak, 2008.



“Relations II”, oil on canvas, 80x60cm, 2000

that occurs while it infiltrates the artist’s spiritual prism and the events arising from it. The visual idea comes from experiencing the visual feelings of artists from previous epochs. In my opinion, the complete artistic heritage results from the solution given by the artist from the Cave of Altamira where, in his rendering of a bison, he points to the principles of the later paintings. He had no desire to dictate postulates, but he extracted shapes and colours out of his inner necessity. Through millennia the presentation was deepened in various ways but still it preserved the initial visual position of the “Bison from the Cave of Altamira”. This awareness led artistic thought through time, while artists pulled out of it the creative juices that were stored in their temperament and the temperaments of their artistic ancestors. Of course, they did not have to see the aforementioned “Bison from the Cave of Altamira”, but they carried it



“Vucji Do – 7:15h”, oil on canvas, 80x60cm, 1985

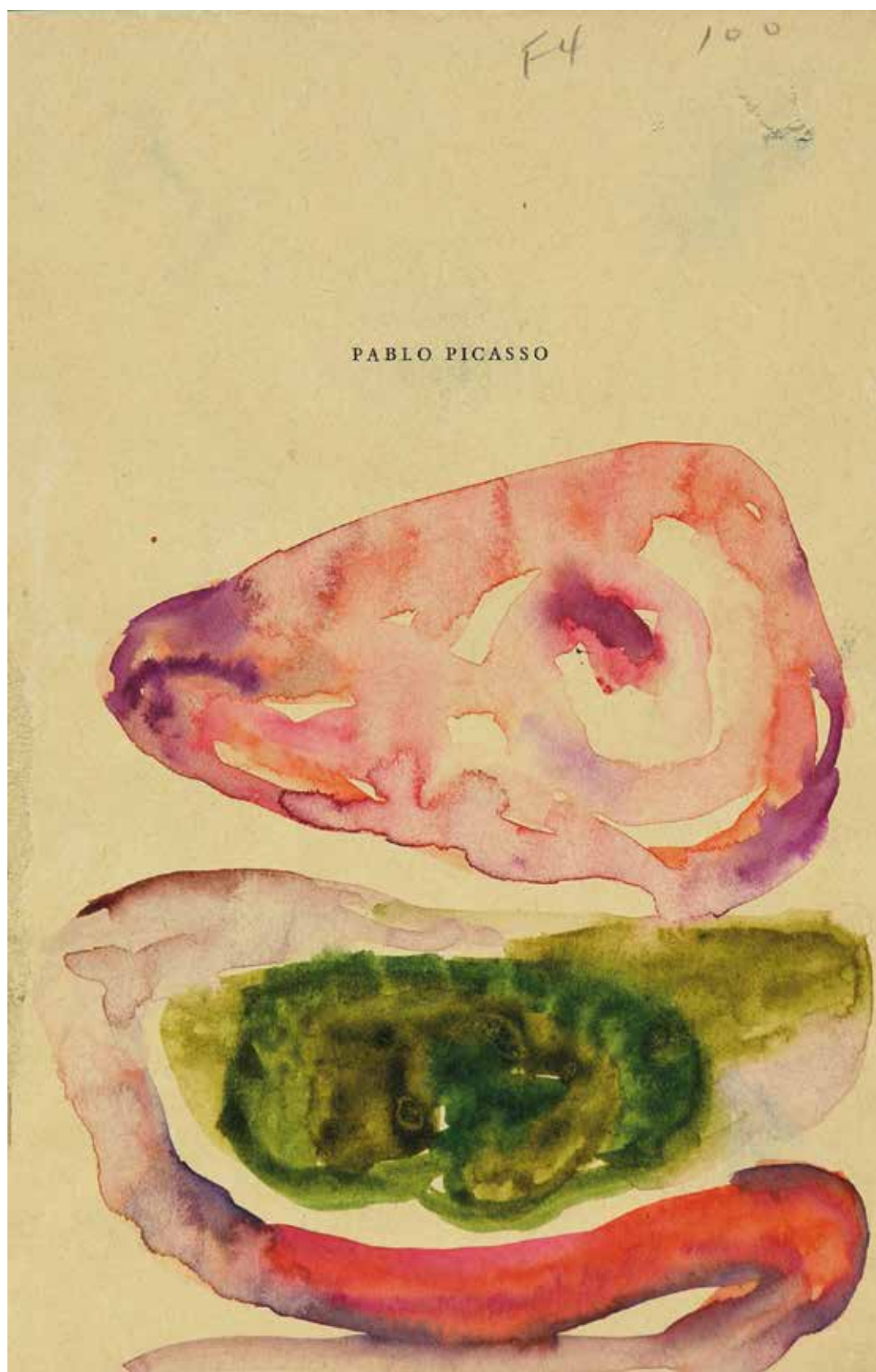
in their genetic heritage and felt it through their inner being. These feelings remained also after photography and moving pictures had appeared, after those moments when genesis took a new path along which, nevertheless, all the solutions from Altamira appear as well.<sup>69</sup>

Already in his early work, Todorovic was creating paintings-in-paintings through the series *“Faces”* and he continued this in the series *“Scenes”* and *“Relations”*. In the painting *“Carrion”* (1985) there is a completely defined separate unit of a colourfully abstract framed painting on the canvas which shows a lamb cut into pieces.

This approach can be further traced through Todorovic’s complete oeuvre, but the process is most evident in the series *“Relations II”*. A parallel can be drawn between these and the works created in the **period 1999–2001**, as well as the drawings in mixed media on printed paper created around 2005. The peculiarity of this approach by Todorovic is that it opens up three issues important to him: the structural, the symbolic and the colouristic. The painting *“Relations II”* (2000) is indicative of all the attributes on which Todorovic insists: an “extinguished” dark and turbulent background in which he placed a naked half-figure of expressive charge, while the rest of the space is occupied by fragments – parts of special units in which the artist resolves another action – a fine abstract weaving.

Depending on the moment in which he creates the artwork, Todorovic selects the procedure for developing the composition. There is no essential difference, but a changed use of visual attributes and their interactions within the same unit. In the early phase the figurative, broken-up, expressive setting favours his momentary visual feeling; after this, the fractured forms calm down, especially in contact with the colourful sensations in which the composition contains a painting-in-a-painting. Examples of such an approach are also found in the series *“Vucji Do”* and particularly in the presentation of the flag as an independent painting-in-a-painting. We have a similar situation in the works in the series *“Memory”* and *“Adam and Eve”*, in which there occurs a merging of two or more units. The procedure indicates that the composition of the painting-in-a-painting gives way to the integrity of many plans that make up the presentation.

<sup>69</sup> This thesis has no palpable evidence but is worth thinking of when considering both Todorovic and the entire fine art heritage!



"Carrion", aquarelle, 17,5x11,5cm, 1978

# VIII IN SEARCH OF THE SYMBOLISM OF THE PAINTING

It was at a very early stage that Rajko Todorovic began a study of symbolic systems, and this is evident in the paintings of the series *“Carrion”* and *“Beasts”*, dating from approximately 1978. During his studies at the Faculty of Fine Arts he created a watercolour composition which carries a sequence of symbolic keys that should be brought to the level of deciphering. On this occasion he felt that he had to deal with a more detailed definition of his own symbolic system. In his time, Herbert Read altered Max Dvořák’s expression of *“Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte”*<sup>70</sup> to *“Geistesgeschichte als Kunstgeschichte”*<sup>71</sup>, explaining that: “When the artist creates symbols to show reality, the intellect can be formed as a structure of thought. He creates these symbols by becoming acquainted with new forms of reality and presenting his knowledge on them through visual and poetic performances.”<sup>72</sup>

On a torn-out printed sheet, under the inscription **Pablo Picasso**, Todorovic made a watercolour composition that represented an animal’s skull with arranged intestines. In this way, Todorovic was establishing a connection between his intervention (the skull with intestines) and the symbol of modern art personalised in the very name: **Pablo Picasso**. This watercolour sheet shows, as is the case with the majority he created, the abundant use of water while using a small amount of pigment, so that the sheet appears translucent. Forms in interaction acquire a new meaning. Everything that is **Pablo Picasso** has another resonance to it and no longer represents ordinary presentation, but one with a broad metaphorical meaning. The connection is not established incidentally, but is extracted from the young artist’s awareness of symbolic interdependence, through which the presentation acquires its ultimate meaning. It was a long search for a reduced visual means which was to express his attitude toward modern art in general, for which the very name of Pablo Picasso is a synonym.

In the meantime he began his research for the series *“Beasts”*, which can be observed as a symbolic relationship between the forces of evil (the beast) and the forces of good (art), but also as a sign that the barbarism personified in the beast is also experiencing horror.

<sup>70</sup> “Art history as a history of spiritual development.”

<sup>71</sup> “The history of spiritual development as a history of artistic development.”

<sup>72</sup> Herbert Read, *Icon and Idea*, IKP MLADOST, Zagreb, 1965.

He felt that what he started doing on the sheet of paper in 1978 had not been completed and that it should be deepened. The contact with Picasso was established in a reduced mode, where a single spark indicated the essence, while his meeting with Petar Lubarda was more turbulent. Todorovic's oil painting "**Carrion**" (1985) established a connection with Lubarda's "Slaughtered Lamb"<sup>73</sup>, but also with Chaim Soutine's "Skinned Ox". In no way does this "connection" mean imitation, copying or a source of inspiration. It is a homage to the great master who made his mark on art in Montenegro as well as during the post-occupation period of Yugoslavia. At the same time it is a homage to Chaim Soutine<sup>74</sup> and Rembrandt, as was once made also by Mica Popovic. On this occasion, the attention is focused only on Lubarda. 'The dominant olive-green tone', says Lazar Trifunovic of the "**Slaughtered Lamb**", 'that is so characteristic of Lubarda's first period remains; the artist varies it, extinguishes it and melts it with emotion. The paintings from this "Slaughtered Lamb" phase lose in structure but gain in tension.'<sup>75</sup> Points of contact between Lubarda's and Todorovic's presentations are manifested in forms which, as Trifunovic writes, "lose in structure but gain in tension". Tension is the general characteristic of Todorovic's research, especially in the series "**Carrion**"/"**Beasts**". The organisations of these two paintings (one by Lubarda and one by Todorovic) have very different emotional responses. The essence of the comparison is not in the analysis of the external expression, but of that which is within. Lubarda insists on calm emotion, while Todorovic brings it all to boiling point. The forms of presentation of "**Slaughtered Lamb**" form a whole in which each part has its own full separate meaning. Lubarda reduced the forms, while Todorovic extended them by introducing two animal skulls, apparently the skulls of lambs. The manner of composition of the elements is different. With Lubarda, the slaughtered lamb is being prepared for further processing until it is served at the table, while Todorovic's animal is butchered in an undefined space, which abounds in information and emphasised colours and where the colours collide while fighting for their place. In spite of the motif, which refers to slaughter, Lubarda's painting does not appear cruel, while Todorovic's "**Carrion**" simply reeks of unwarranted butchery. This is even more strongly underlined through the introduction of red, which associates with blood and refers to motion in a semiotic circle. It is hard to say whether Todorovic extracted this painting out of his visual memory, but there is a high probability that he did. The significant difference is in the aesthetic key which is crueler with Todorovic and continues in the series "**Vucji Do**". The contact between Lubarda's and Todorovic's presentations remains at the level of a light touch in the exterior expression that carries a symbolic layer.

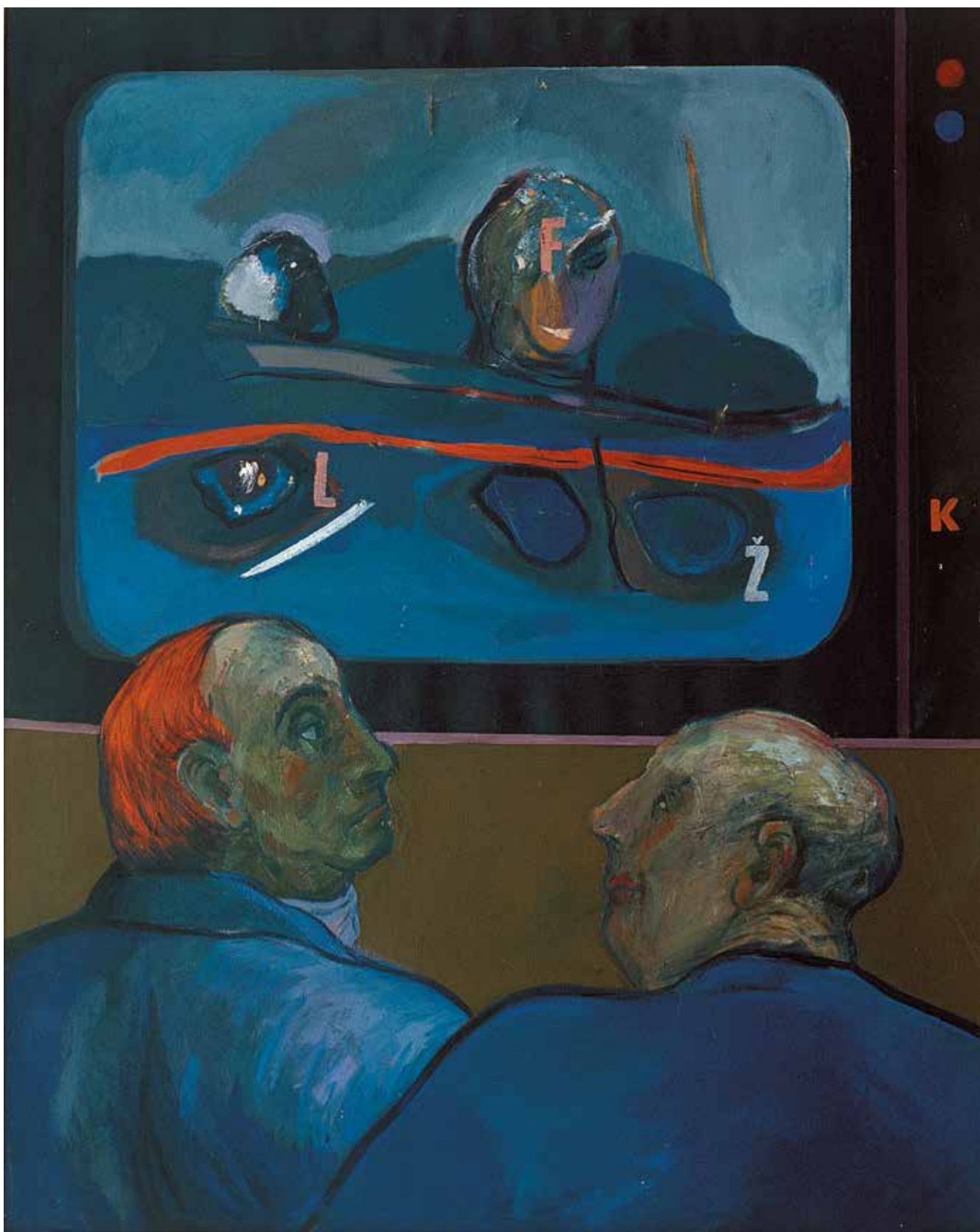
<sup>73</sup> From the collection of the National Museum in Belgrade, dated the eve of war, around 1940.

<sup>74</sup> As Todorovic says, Soutine is a painter very close to him.

<sup>75</sup> Lazar Trifunovic, Petar Lubarda, *Slikari i vajari* edition, Trece kolo, Prosveta, Beograd, 1964.

In pointing out Todorovic's connections with his great predecessors, it must be noted that we are referring to dialogues with Picasso, Lubarda and, to some extent, with Soutine. While he was completing his dialogue with the great Spaniard, Lubarda remained a constant challenge, as is revealed in the series "**Vucji Do**". In any case, this research cannot be linked to a taking over, but to a contact between two ways of visual thinking in experiencing the same theme. Todorovic is not one of those artists who have built their own poetic arrangement on the experiences of other masters, no matter how great they were.

The emotion of the drawing (Indian ink on paper, 1980) situates it in the series "**Carrion**", while it establishes a qualitatively different symbolic relation. In the background there is a television screen broadcasting almost the same skull as the one from 1978. Two people captured in semi-profiles are placed in the foreground, while the background is taken up by a television screen. It is most likely that this is a symbolic play which suggests a path that is to be taken occasionally. We have got over Picasso, but the television screen, in the opinion of many the destroyer of our lives, begins its daily dance of death. If Picasso and his inexhaustible genius dictated the direction of visual movements by enriching them for decades, then the New Age, through this electronic device, dictates its further development which spiritually impoverishes. This sheet can be interpreted as Todorovic's revolt against the destruction of spirituality and creative impoverishment. It was created in 1980 and was his first different contact with the *New Digital Civilisation* that enhanced its activity. In the Balkan region, this gathered pace in the late nineteen-seventies and today it has conquered the entire "visual space". Todorovic's drawing indicates the beginning of changes in psychological meanings – from the political propaganda of the time to those interventions of "reality" that grind everything before it, thus destroying the individual whose brain is tuned not to think but to experience the world as broken through the field-glasses of events on the screen. No one can presume with certainty where this might lead us, since each new day brings news surprises from the New Age. The drawing is, at the same time, an illustration of artistic life and through its actions time manifest itself in different ways. When a painting, passing through its life stages, remains young, it indicates the complexity of the artist's feelings. An oil painting of a similar content created in 1979 and a drawing from 1978 connect the two series: the first one belongs to "**Carrion**" while the next one is part of "**Relations**". In the first presentation of "**Relations**" the composition of the event is nervous, while in the oil painting it is calm and colour-defined. A blue-tinted gamma is predominant, while red accents break up its monotony. There is an event on the screen in the background; its organisation and inventory – a head with Latin script on it – and its symbolic stimulus open up many doubts about the interpretation of the phenomenon. In fact, at the time when these works were created, television had had no decisive impact on the environment and the "common man", nor was



"Relations I", oil on canvas, 120x102cm, 1979



"Relations II", oil on canvas, 150x190cm, 1998

it determining human behaviour to such an extent. The television image today frightens and threatens, while the extent of its possible detrimental effect still cannot be perceived.

The development of the series "**Beasts**" from 1982 corresponds more to the internal charge of Todorovic, who understands this in an exciting and transcendental way. The "**Carrion**" series is "calm" while "**Beasts**" is rigid but tense and leads to a dynamic explosion that had been accumulating in it. Between the static moment and furious drama the entire early symbolic code related to drawing and painting of Todorovic's quests is on the move. If the first watercolour was focused on Picasso and the second visual presentation was focused on the relation between man and television, then the third one brings to the surface a number of contradictory emotions. The real space of the painting spreads out, including a series of data which complements the general visual performance.



“Vucji Do – 06:34h”, oil on canvas, 181x150cm, 1987

# IX THE LAYERS OF EVIL IN *VUCJI DO*

Rajko Todorovic's series "*Vucji Do*" is often associated with Lubarda's works "*The Battle at Vucji Do*" and "*The Battle of Kosovo*". It is clear that Lubarda, while resolving these presentations – besides creating many sketches and paintings in which he broke up the forms – also marked the unity of form and colour in search of a true visual frame. Both Lubarda's and Todorovic's series have the same event as a motif – the victory won by the Montenegrins and Herzegovinians against the Ottoman army.<sup>76</sup>

Lubarda created both "*The Battle at Vucji Do*" and "*The Battle of Kosovo*" through phases – from study to study, from painting to painting and by reducing data, they were brought down to three colours: red, blue and green, which determined the drama on the canvas, while he underlined the rhythm with accents of other colours. The forms are sharp and follow the colouristic sensations. Spears are being broken, swords are flashing and horses are whinnying in gallop. It all relates to the impact of man on man, horse on horse, spear on spear, sword on yataghan, *bayrak* on flag. It is not the individual characters that is important, but the overall event, which Lubarda wove into a geometric shape in the final version.<sup>77</sup>

Rajko Todorovic's procedure is reversed. He is not looking for a solution in a direct clash of two armies through colour and form, but he divides the event into a sequence of images that make up a whole, providing the experience with an ultimate sound. The parts are placed in an active relation so that through a conscious procedure they can find their position in the general experience while emphasising all the tragedy of the event. Although it may seem that everything is being left to its own devices, it is still an illusion which Todorovic controls. He limits some paintings with a timetable which he draws out from his personal epic memories experienced from the stories told by his ancestors. Lubarda tames the colour; he directs it to the symbolism carried by grouped forms of red, blue and green. More precisely – Lubarda's process constructs an abstract geometric painting and its essence is to determine the events emphasised by colourful masses and drawings. In Lubarda's painting there is a "terrible noise" of spears breaking, of yataghans and swords clattering, of whinnying and bounding

<sup>76</sup> The victory of the Montenegrin army under the command of Prince Nikola over the Ottoman army led by Mukhtar Pasha in 1876.

<sup>77</sup> "Lubarda is much more of a Byzantine than I am!" Todorovic said in an interview. "I may be an African, one of the primitive ones! I'm all vulgar, brutal. With Lubarda it is epic. With me there is no epic or heroic, there is only the tragic!"

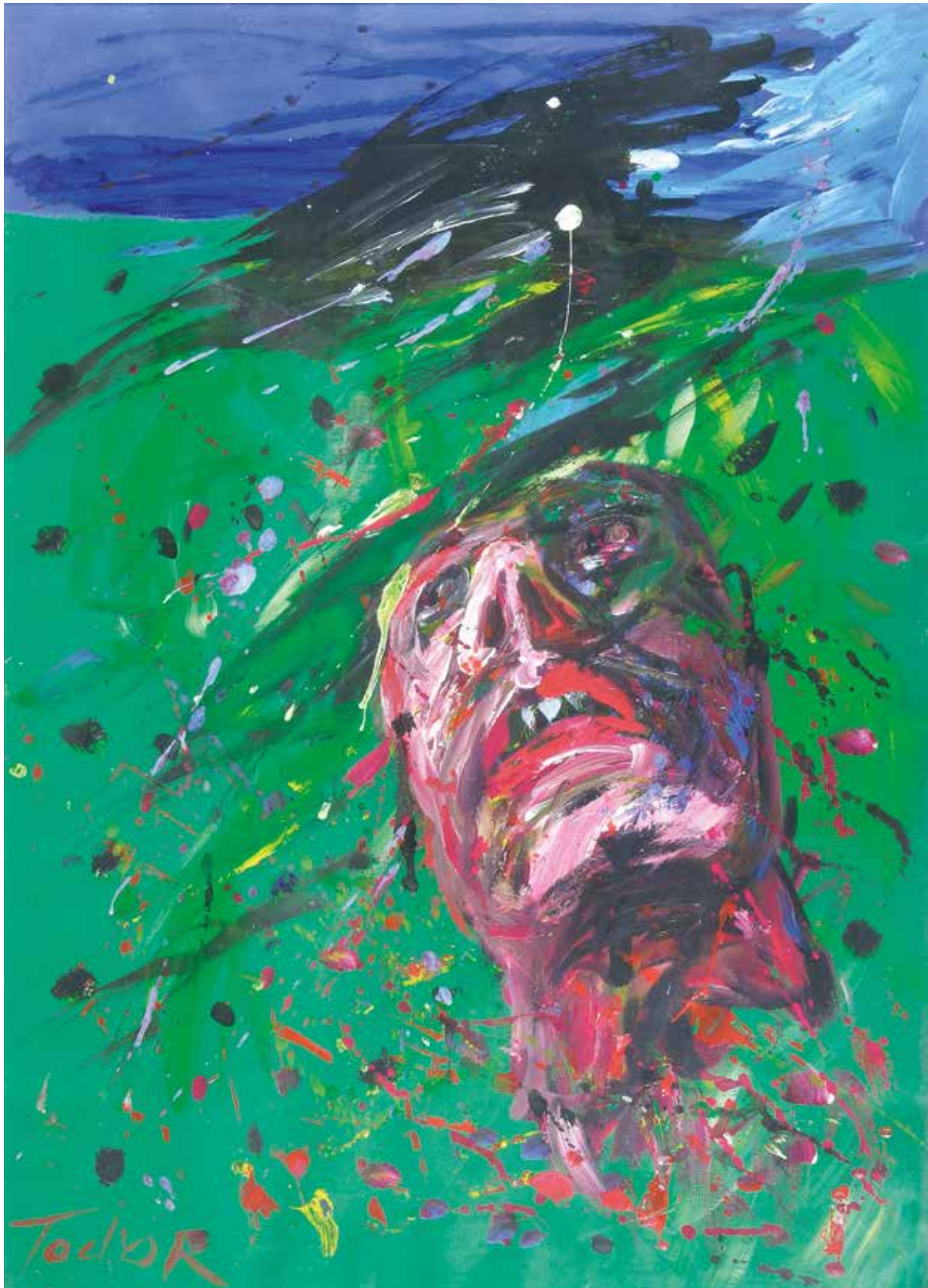
horses. It complements the event acoustically so that the observer feels the battle resounding in his ear while his body is full of the dust from the ground that was thrown up by the horses.

Todorovic lets the forms float freely through the open spaces of otherworldly silence of the event happening on his paintings; he is not aspiring to form a unit by linking them to each other. He does not paint an event – the *Battle* – but the tragic feeling of the event, the consequences which the bloody conflict, filled with silence, has left behind. The sweeping, frantic people are absent; the horses are missing; the flashing of swords and breaking of spears, as well as everything that is a product of a battle, has been silenced. Todorovic's paintings resonate with a "deaf silence" that is occasionally disturbed by the weeping and wailing of the injured participants and their whimper. Rumbling, clattering, shattering, noise and shouting echo from Lubarda's paintings. The difference in volume is the main difference in the feeling for events that the paintings of these two artists reflect: in one group of paintings there is noise that deafens and in the other there is a posthumous and solemn silence. It is important to feel this acoustic difference between the two approaches to the same event: the tone in Lubarda's paintings gives one particular projection, while the tone in Todorovic's paintings gives a different projection. That is why Todorovic does not name his series "*The Battle at Vucji Do*" but just "**Vucji Do**". Besides the structural differences between Lubarda and Todorovic, the most significant difference is that Lubarda's visual skill and its performance are in the foreground, while with Todorovic it is the feeling of painfulness and tragedy that is in the foreground and the visual frame just follows this.

The existential layer leads to the absurdity taking place on the green surface. In "*The Battle at Vucji Do*" and "*The Battle of Kosovo*", through accelerated rhythms, Lubarda sums up the consequences of the clashes between armies into one form. Todorovic's figures, although clearly defined within themselves, dissolve the entirety into a whole range of related independent blocks. He is not tending towards the eventual uniting of all the parts, as is the case with Lubarda, but towards making each one exist individually, with a consciousness of the tragedy that took place on the ground soaked in blood and planted with decapitated heads and headless bodies. The number of casualties<sup>78</sup> in itself expresses the tragedy that Todorovic feels and he transposes that feeling onto the canvas.

Closer points of contact in the presentation of the same event can be found in the cut-off head which is lying on the ground in Lubarda's painting, with which Todorovic establishes only an external contact. The cut-off head which Lubarda leaves on the ground is a tragic piece of information with no aspiration of deepening the feeling. Present with Todorovic is his idea that "Evil emerges from the ground! Layers of

<sup>78</sup> The Ottoman military losses alone amounted to about 4,000 dead and 310 captured soldiers.



“Vucji Do – 19:40h”, acrylic, 52x35cm, 1985

evil are deposited here and the landscape carries all the tragedy!”<sup>79</sup> In this way the presentations of cut-off heads go beyond the external contact by absorbing the poetic note. The cut-off head in Lubarda’s fragment/study in oil (1950), made for the “*The Battle at Vucji Do*”, searches for its logic in the final composition, in its final version in which everything has melted into a whole and has almost disappeared. This fragment underwent a number of stylisations until it became an integral part of the complete event. Todorovic’s decapitated heads have another visual logic: in one picture (write in words, regardless of the photos!) and the painting “*Vucji Do – at 3.34 pm*” on a green surface on which a cut-off head lies, the whole universe appears out of the slit throat; in the Big Bang it explodes like a supernova, creating its own universe which in red lines, drops and crossings moves toward the blueness of the cosmos. After that, there is silence. Heads are lying on the green ground and there is no sound around, while the newly created cosmos searches for the purpose of its existence. The study of this phenomenon has already been noted in the painting “*Vucji Do*” (1985) that precedes and influences the later presentations of this series, which was also initiated by the changes in the history of this region and its people.

Groups of naked and headless bodies of an expressionist charge are extruding “new cosmoses” in Todorovic’s paintings – through slit throats and mouths on cut-off heads, while a bullet-riddled flag shows behind them. The approach to the cut-off head and the headless body appeared for the first time in “*Scene*” (1980). It is possible that through this painting Todorovic felt the need to re-implant the mutilated bodies from “*Vucji Do*”. It is difficult to say whether the idea that was to be realised seven years later through the epopee and suffering that led to the Great Victory was conceived here. In any case, this is a composition of expressive electricity with surreal elements, divided into three geometric units. The decapitated body occupies all three segments, while the cut-off head is on a yellow background. Both parts of the figure are divided by a semi-diagonal while there is a barely visible aura around the head.

<sup>79</sup> Conversation with Todorovic held on 19 June 2010.

# X THE FLAG AND THE CROSS

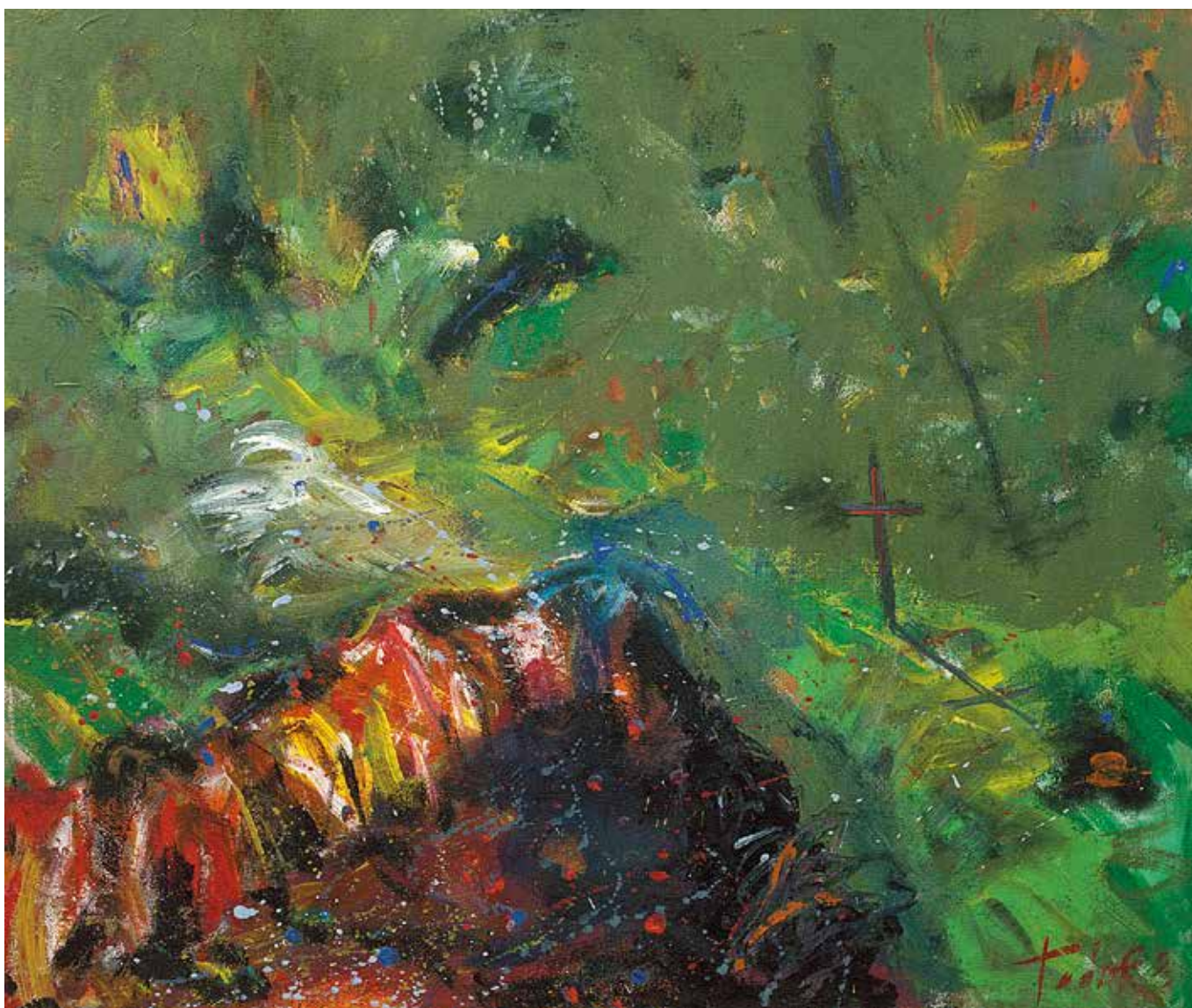
## The Language of Symbols in “*Vucji Do*”

With both Lubarda and Todorovic, the flags at Vucji Do are “wounded” with bullets and a sharp weapon, which symbolically indicate the severity of the conflict, manifested in the “hurt”, but not slain, flag. Todorovic understood the experience of the flag as a sign, that is, as a symbolic art form. The sign, as a part of his poetic principles, appears very early on and is deeply embedded in the symbolic structures and down-to-earth essence of the painting.

Iconographic trends, which accompany Todorovic’s research, can be found in a special place on the flag and the cross which are sometimes hidden and woven into the composition as a guide mark and accent in the paintings of “*Vucji Do*”, while in particular paintings they carry the entire event. The rectangular symbol in “*Relations*”, a kind of frame which is often repeated three times, indicates, according to the artist’s testimony, a relation with the transcendental in the form of a schematised symbol of a coffin or a tombstone image. The cross, as well as the flag, are important symbols in Todorovic’s oeuvre – from the especially emphasised letter ‘t’ in his signature that resembles the cross, to obvious examples of powerful experience of this symbol on the flag in “*Vucji Do*”, or hidden and immersed into the environment of the landscape of “*Krnovo*”.

Lubarda’s flag is not in the foreground but has “grown into” the event. Lubarda is not interested in the flag as a phenomenon, although it refers to the wounds that the white cross has obtained on the faded red rectangular surface. Todorovic’s flag has different symbolic meanings. In his study on Todorovic, Dragan Radovanovic<sup>80</sup> accurately observed that the content is defined by “intensive confrontations of madder and cadmium yellow, chromium oxide green and crimson”. What could be added to this is that such use of the palette directs Todorovic toward a new quest in which he introduces a painted stain surrounded by a series of sprayed paint droplets into his artistic arsenal. On Todorovic’s “*Vucji Do*” paintings there are no horses galloping, people running or animals leaping. All the drama and rhythm are achieved by colouristic patches and an “easy” manner of dragging the brush over the canvas. The process was not premeditated but intuitively derives from the artist’s interior, like a distant echo of action painting. For a long time Todorovic had been questioning

<sup>80</sup> Catalogue for the retrospective exhibition, Modern Art Centre of Montenegro, Podgorica, 2005, p. 81



"Terra Terabilita", oil on canvas, 70x80cm, 1993

the process which had been ripening in him and it then erupted on the surface and remained there. Those red, green and blue colours do not have the same function as they have with Lubarda. They have their own life which makes Todorovic's composition polysemic. This is underlined in the figures involved in this massacre, figures that are not uniformed, but are naked and lying over the landscape and waiting for their bodies to be taken up to heaven.

Heads are flying, carried by a force that penetrates from the inner layer; later on these calm down after growing together with the soil. The understanding of these paintings should not be sought only in their action but, more importantly, in the colouristic explosion and expressiveness of the scenes, divided by their timing. Two semiotic codes are present, one of which is expressively colouristic and the other which is

a symbolic code – they point to the scope of this artist’s fine art scale developed through the entire series. Both of these codes reach a crescendo in the *baryak*<sup>81</sup>, that is, the flag and the cross of “**Vucji Do**”. The *baryak*/flag does not have the function of an ideological, political, religious or party-political feature, but marks the tragedy of an event that had a grave outcome for the Montenegrin people, despite the victory achieved in the Battle of Vucji Do.

In his review of Rajko Todorovic’s work, Milorad Simunovic reminds that the flag from Vucji Do can be seen at the National Museum of Montenegro in Cetinje. Simunovic asks: “Is that flag a work of art? No, thankfully, it is not and it does not occur to anyone to treat it in such a way.”<sup>82</sup>

The painter Mica Popovic asked himself the question: “What is a flag?” and replied – “It is a painting on a canvas ... I thought: who was the first to take a ready-made painting as the subject for a new painting? It seems to me that Jasper Johns was the first to embark on such an adventure. In a rather complicated visual language he began to transform the American flag into a structural painting. Todor had also painted ready-made paintings – flags. He did not change anything in the idea or in the structure, but he had succeeded in creating an exciting new painting. He just copied an old flag from the last century and got a modern one from this century. What an accomplishment!”<sup>83</sup>

It may seem that in this way these two opposing views exclude each other. The matter is more complicated: they do not exclude each other but are observed from two psychologically different angles. The flag at Vucji Do, as in almost all battles, has its own function – the marking of the combat units – and it is always in the midst of the heaviest events. Todorovic draws out childhood stories from his memories and blends them into an act of pure art in the paintings of “**Vucji Do**”. That is, he transfers them from his internal memory to the reality of the painting – a reality, the principal moment of which is a red flag with a white cross, which he had, undoubtedly, seen at the National Museum in Cetinje. The cross is a sign whose symbolic meaning extends beyond the event. *IN HOC SIGNO VINCES* is attributed to Constantine’s dream, from which official recognition of Christianity emerged! That dream of the sign of the cross, on the night before the upcoming event, was a sign that this dream foretold his victory. The acceptance of the cross as a symbol of Constantine’s victory resulted in the enthronement of a new faith: one with the cross as the symbol of Christianity, which pushed aside other interpretations of this sign. In this sense, “a ready-made painting” was taking its symbolic place in the struggle between Islam and Christianity at Vucji Do. A series of symbolic meanings is in focus: the clash of the white and red

<sup>81</sup> The Turks do not pronounce it **baryak** but **bayrak**

<sup>82</sup> Catalogue for the retrospective exhibition, Centre of Modern Art of Montenegro, Podgorica, 2005

<sup>83</sup> Catalogue for the retrospective exhibition, Centre of Modern Art of Montenegro, Podgorica, 2005



“Vucji Do – 18:30h”, oil on canvas, 200x180cm, 1987

against the green; the “wounds” on the flags and the cross from bullets and sharp blades – this provided Todorovic’s series with an opportunity for a different reading and represents a framework without which the event would be empty and bereft of strength. We should not forget the motto – *TO SHED OUR BLOOD FOR THE HOLY CROSS*. One fits and complements the other, which gives the series “*Vucji Do*” yet another dimension.

The colouristic expression is linked with abstract clashes of colour in the left segment of the painting “*Vucji Do – 5.30 pm*”; this allowed Todorovic to introduce, in a major way, a non-figurative colouristic treatment in 1989, which is in synergy with geometric symbolic shapes – the cross placed on a red and white square. This has been indicated in sketches for the painting “*Vucji Do – 11 am*” where the abstract colouristic treatment appears together with an expressive human feature on the flag at Vucji Do.

# XI

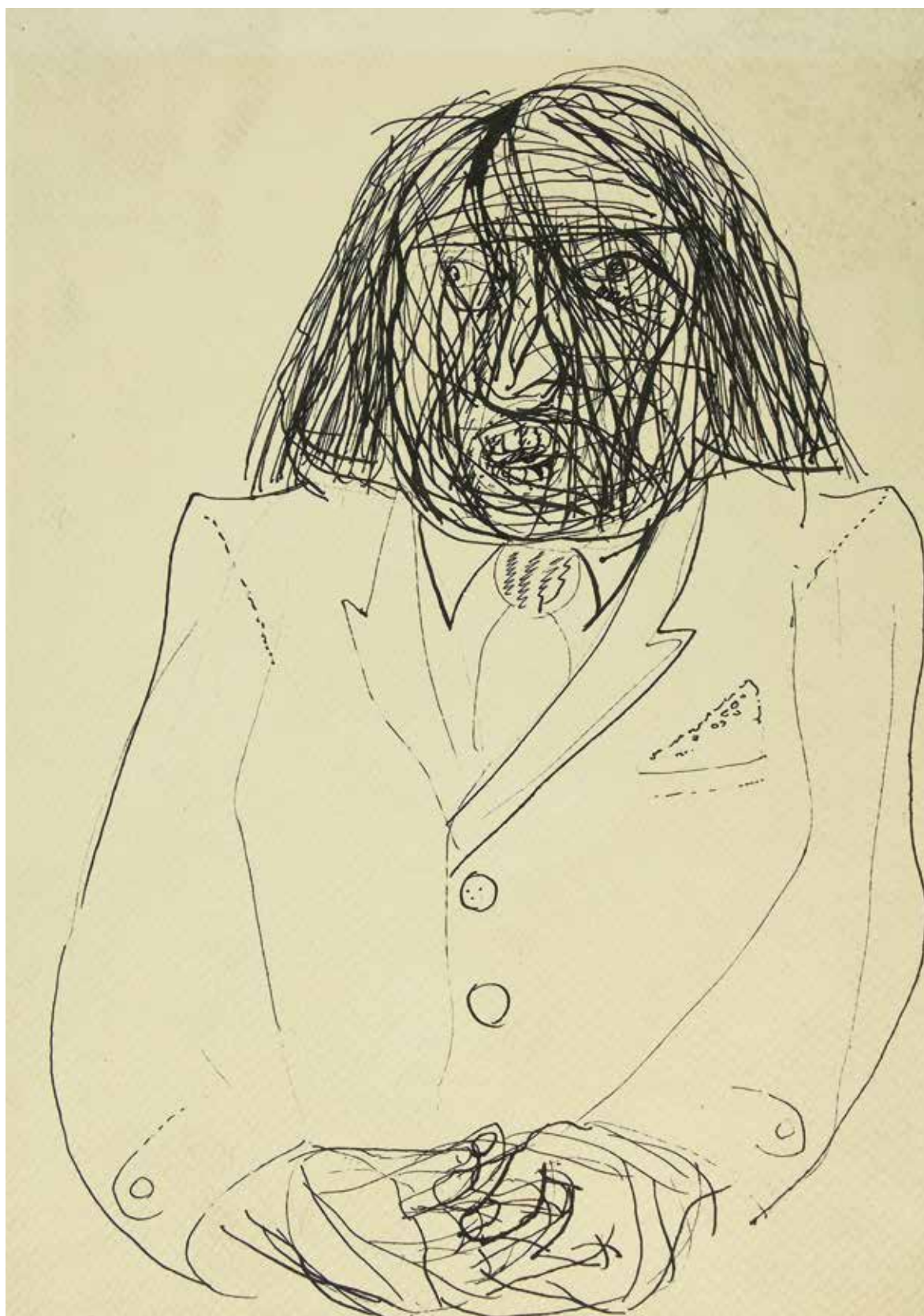
## THE MAGIC OF THE DRAWING

Asking himself the question “What is a drawing?”, Lazar Trifunovic concluded: “A response in the form of a brief theoretical definition is not easy because a drawing has two lives: it is an auxiliary means of painting in the moment of one’s first reaction to nature and it is also a self-contained discipline, an independent phenomenon with its laws and its own aesthetic principles. In both meanings a drawing has several significances but in each one of them it is extremely abstract and extremely concrete [...] There is no stylistic development in the drawing, as there is in other disciplines: painting, music and literature; the drawing does not recognise changes such as Classicism, Romanticism or Realism – when these changes exist they are barely implied visibly.”<sup>84</sup> The attitude of Lazar Trifunovic suggests a possible way of considering the drawing work of Rajko Todorovic. If we compare the academic tasks that he solved during his study period with those he created following his own personal feelings, one can conclude that this is an artist who has mastered drawing from all its sides – from school exercises and what Trifunovic called “an auxiliary means of painting” to that which represents “a self-contained discipline” that is “extremely abstract and extremely concrete”. Todorovic turned his sparks into flame, into a colour that reflects the state of mind, despite the fact that there is no colour on the paper sheets but it is placed in the inner feeling that is bursting out, even when it is not formally materialised. It is the inner existence of the visual performances which Todorovic carries in him. Those were the roots on which he formed a visual model, which he used to check his visual vocabulary and the wealth of personal visual lexicon. The eye is the main “tool” of every visual artist; it is a device through which he observes and transposes the seen. “The eyesight, which is developed through studying, teaches us to see”, said Cézanne.<sup>85</sup> Todorovic knows that and feels it in his artistic being. But he also knows very well what Picasso said to Christian Zervos in 1934: “...the artist works out of necessity. He is an insignificant element in the world that should not be given greater importance than so many other things in nature that fascinate us but which we do not explain to ourselves.”

Todorovic’s beginnings were marked by the broadening of his artistic horizons, the time of impact that the environment in, which he temporarily resided, provided, corrections by teachers and contact with colleagues that he met not only at the

<sup>84</sup> Lazar Trifunovic, *From Impressionism to Enformel*, NOLIT, Belgrade, 1982.

<sup>85</sup> Paul Cézanne, Letter to Émile Bernard



Drawing, ink, 38x28cm, 1977



Drawing (Novica Tadić), ink, 40x28cm, 1988

academy. If we compare the schoolwork and drawing exercises of anatomy with those that he created independently, then the direction in which the courses of his research would move becomes obvious. In these drawings is the germ of what would happen later in his work, especially a sense of the drama and rhythm of the sheet or canvas – and I say *sheet* because Todorovic simultaneously cherishes drawing as an independent discipline, thus implying that a parallel research is going on. All the sensations present in the drawings can be found in his paintings. They are not conveyed literally but have been adapted and, as such, incorporated into the composition.

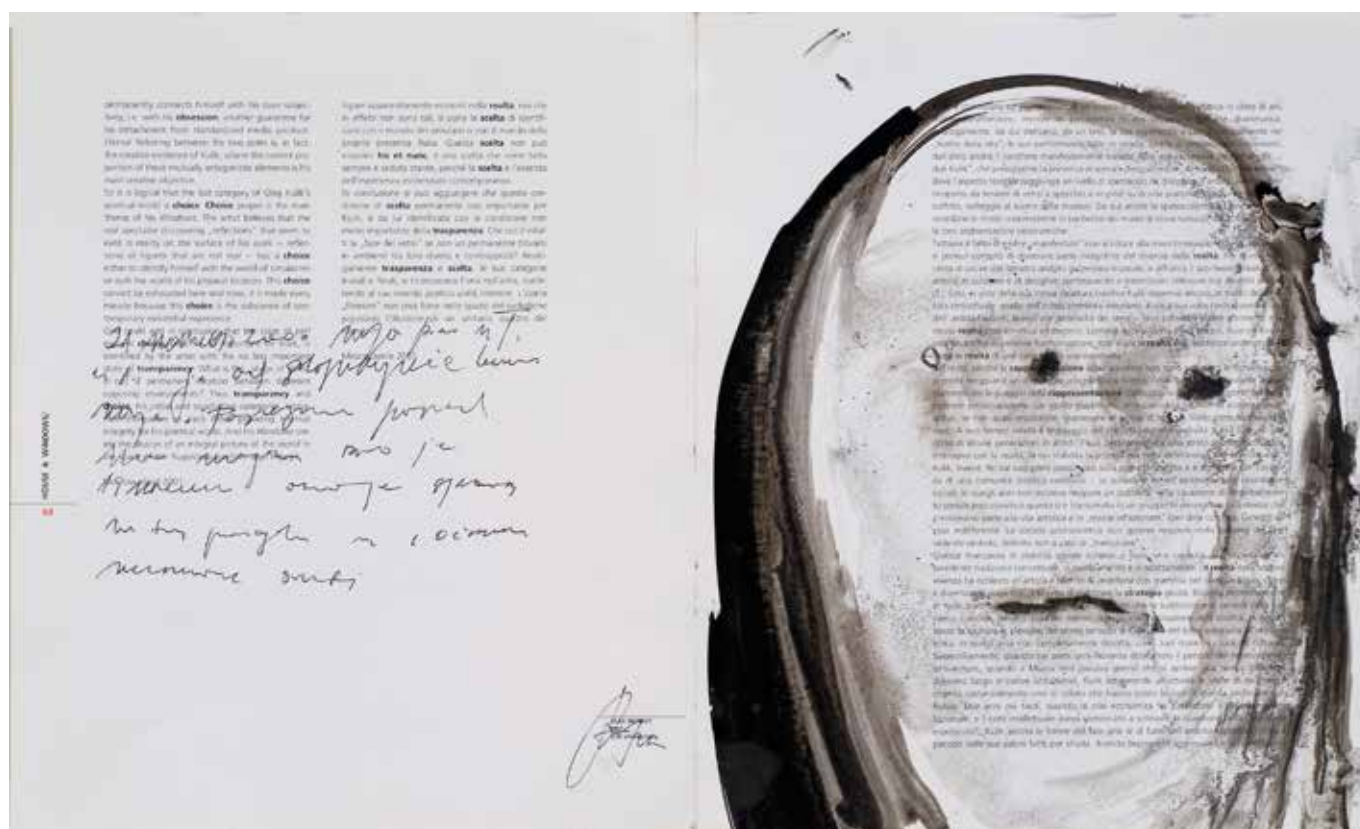
He learned the art of drawing in the period of his education at the teaching academy, at the Faculty of Applied Arts and later at the Faculty of Fine Arts. This was done vocationally to perfection! As well as many previous generations, he felt that a drawing was the armature of a painting, no matter how invisible it was. The exhibition Todorovic organised in 2008<sup>86</sup> clearly showed the retroactive effects of a drawing on a painting, but also how the painting affected the drawing. The two independent disciplines are not roughly separated but rather complement each other. If the drawing was a guideline in the first period then the painting in time became a guide mark for the drawing.

It is hard to say whether drawings or paintings precede the *“Beasts”* series – I do not think it matters. The same is the case with the blocks *“Sole Mio”* and *“View”*. Drawings accompany the course of paintings, and vice versa, thus forming series that are not sharply separated from each other, but pervade and form a unit that breathes harmoniously. There are a few visual dilemmas in them, while rare colouristic accents on some sheets represent exceptional outings.

A separate group consists of those created on printing paper, such as the *“Portrait of Mother”* and those with scenes depicting events with many figures. In this case, Todorovic is making a written note, which is not closely related to the presentation, no matter how illogical this may sound. With the series *“View”*, Todorovic ceases to avoid introducing more than two figures, which he expands through his drawings.

A special section is comprised of compositions created on digitally prepared surfaces. A presentation is digitally put onto paper: a page from a comic book, a combination of a comic book and printed text or a reproduced painting, mostly of an abstract content with a strong colouristic background. On a paper sheet prepared in this manner Todorovic applies his presentation realised in a colour drawing. This “airing” brings a certain freshness to the “exaggerated experiences” which he mainly dealt with in this segment. However, although he does not mention them, it is likely that he has objections to this area of his research. Still, they form an important and indispensable part of his oeuvre. They have their own technology which “breathes” in a new way.

<sup>86</sup> Rajko Todorovic Todor – Drawings, gallery of the Centre of Modern Art, Podgorica, April 2008.



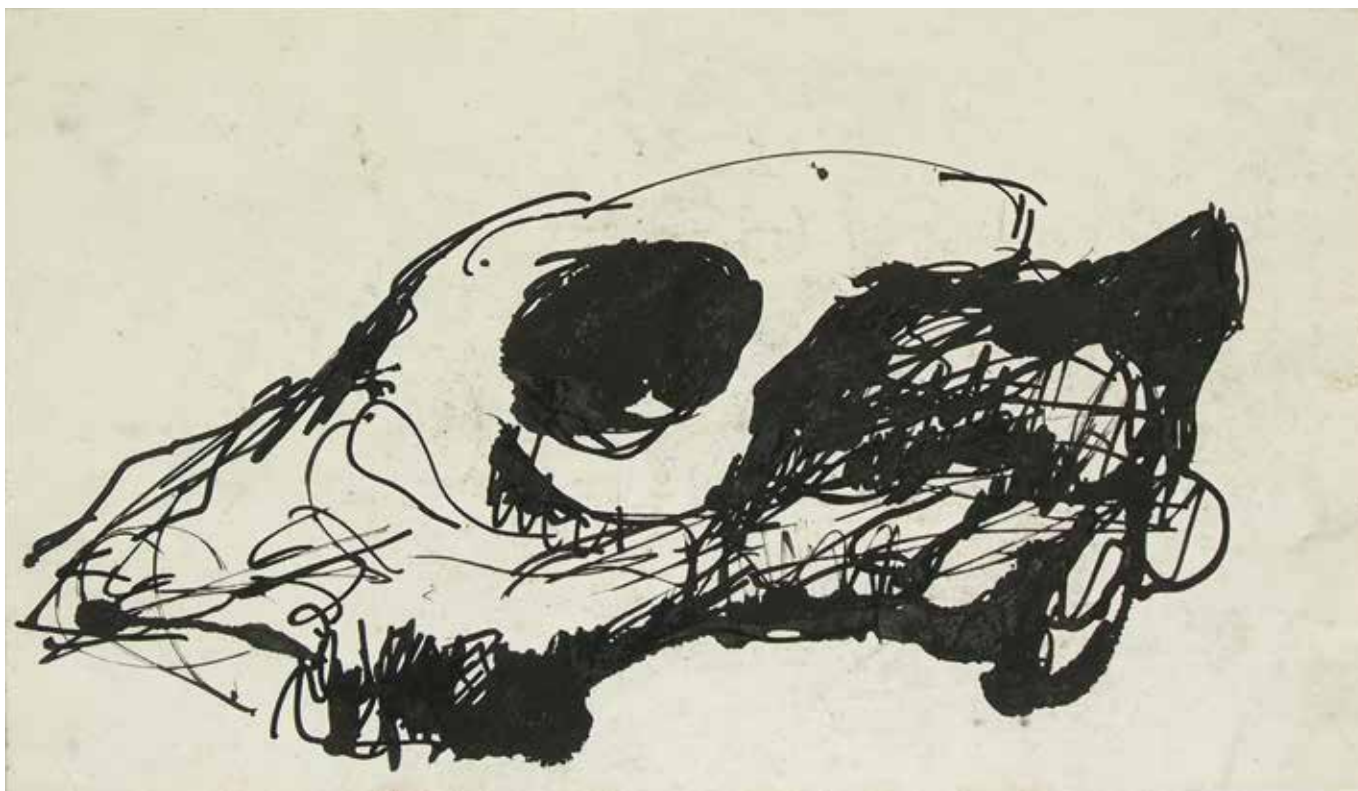
Drawing, ink, 20x36cm, 2004

This is not a rare occurrence in modern painting, but it is an area that is always in the background, something like an accidental note. These drawings can be observed as a particular kind of digital collage treatment which Todorovic created with serious intentions. Therefore, it is unclear why he pushed it aside. In the aforementioned interview with Christian Zervos, Picasso concluded: “One cannot expect the observer to experience my painting as I have experienced it. The painting appears in my mind long before it is painted; who knows how long ago I felt it, saw it and painted it, so that not even I understand the next day what I created”.

We should quote here the quite appropriate remarks made by Mladen Lompar<sup>87</sup>, who in one place concludes: “Todorovic’s line draws the form out from the paper; being strong and definite, it includes in its formation strange or random details in the background and it is the protagonist of an extremely emotional ‘confession’.” The approach mentioned can be applied to the entire artistic oeuvre of Rajko Todorovic, regardless of whether it is a drawing or oil/acrylic painting. Everything in his work belongs to “an extremely emotional confession”.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Mladen Lompar, The Value of Individual Mythology, exhibition catalogue, National Gallery of Macedonia, Skopje, 2006.

<sup>88</sup> At this point I will not repeat the writings on the series of drawings following 2006, since they are mentioned in the critique of Todorovic’s exhibition of drawings from April 2008, which is reproduced in this monograph from the article published in the newspaper “Vecernje Novosti”.



Drawing, ink, 29x23cm, 1975

# XII INSTEAD OF A FOREWORD

The artistic oeuvre of Rajko Todorovic ranged from darkness to light, streaming to colourful explosions which contracted and expanded, decomposed and strengthened his painting. The end of his period of schooling and the beginning of his independent work is characterised by a suffocating atmosphere full of Expressionist resignation where there occasionally flashes a strong and wild colouristic accent. He examined and formulated everything ranging from portraits, human and animal figures, to landscapes and an abstract arrangement of the content of the background. He knew that visual thought “is based on the characters and that the characters include the thought”. He did not neglect the symbolic arrangement. On the contrary, he was paying close attention to it. The “pleasure of completing a work”, or more precisely, the pleasure of completing a series has always been diminishing. It became worn out on its way to the end but, at the same time, it flourished again and developed in the next series, I mean, in the next series after that, that is, in the next series after that, and so on, to infinity. When the regret over *Completion* passes there immediately appears a new *Beginning* and then again a *Completion* and a *Beginning* again...

He felt that the organisation of the painting must harmonise its parts and link together the visual elements. He knew that the “set of forms” united by coloured deposit holds the painting together. This is evident in his work: the unity of each painting results in the unity of the whole composition, regardless of his current interests. He carried within him the liberty of searching and an unexpected courage to leave behind what he found for the sake of something that was just emerging from his visual consciousness, something that he felt he must categorise as an artistic experience. He was not touched by social crises or the impact of big money, which has had a devastating effect on many artists during the last quarter of a century. He has not even been touched by social transition. During the first transition, after World War II, he was young, while during the second one he took refuge in his paintings. He remained virtuous and with an awareness that his life is comprised of imposing statements and judgements through paintings and drawings.

This artist’s work should be considered on this path, while not seeking in him the current impulses that time imposes. Being in time while concurrently staying out of time – he achieved this through a large number of paintings that he created. He *felt* in himself when he was able to express exactly what he was carrying and when the searches were not sufficiently perceived. There constantly mingled in his mouth the

sweetness of victory over the painting and the defeat experienced from the painting he had not completely conceived.

I am starting from the beginning: one should first feel “the nature of painting by Rajko Todorovic Todor”, and it is then that this nature opens up, conveying everything that is in its soul. It communicates its fears, both successful and unsuccessful searches, its doubts, its discoveries and its essence, which is sometimes concealed and should be looked for carefully.

So I finally asked myself the question: “How is one to describe a painting by Todorovic?” – and here is the answer I got: the painting belonging to Todorovic’s last series “**Adam and Eve**” represents human figures in mutual intimacy that sometimes surpasses estrangement. “The Female figure approaches the Male.” “The Female figure is moving away from the Male.” Or “The Female figure is running away from the Male.” Something is always going on between them. There is not one calm detail on the paintings – everything is in action. The colouristic content is burning and stinging everything around it. In order to calm down the fire, Todorovic puts in a yellow circular accent – a ball which draws in the effect of the red colour that dominates the canvas. Or he puts in a cypress – or a pair of cypresses. Or he lets liquid separate the two figures. He calms down the painting. He then feels that this is not enough. He cuts the canvas in two with a crash of red and blue colour, thus creating a horizon of hope or horror. He creates a colouristic atmosphere which is turbulent to bursting. Then he calms down everything with a few strokes. Then he does it once again. This description of presentations in the opus “**Adam and Eve**” corresponds with the majority of paintings belonging to any one of Todorovic’s series. It is only the number of participants in the action and the crashes of colours that “set on fire” the canvas that vary.

The first conclusion that is imposed: “This way of painting is boring!”

The first conclusion is incorrect.

I claim: this art of painting is boiling around the painting, on the painting and inside of it! The boiling continuously ejects new feelings, a new and different material for interpretation.

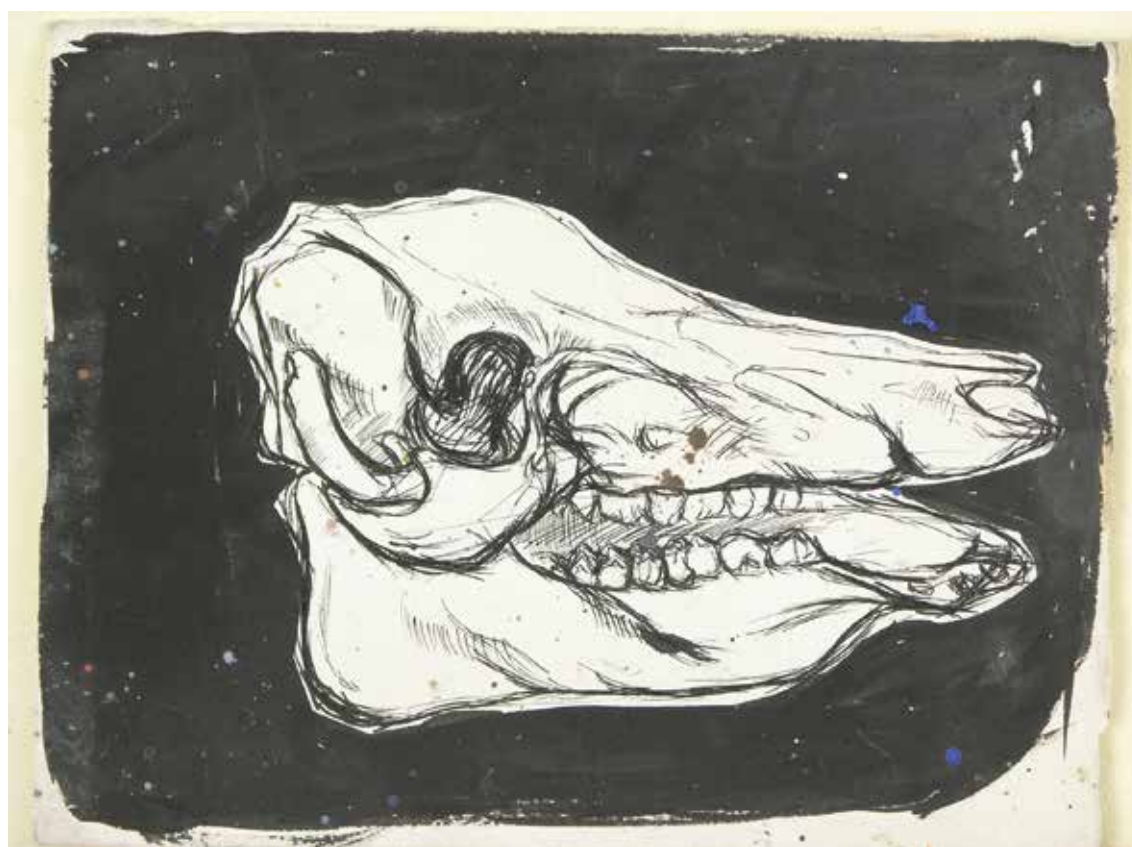
Description of the conclusion: “Everything is the same in that it is so different that it cannot be compared”.

That is where I find the *Strength* of Todorovic’s paintings. They all come from the same source. They are all extracted from the same stockroom of the artist’s memory, converted into visual remembrance! Every event, no matter whether the creator has the model, landscape or whatever in front of him, speaks a language which is stored

in the visual consciousness. “Thinking is based on characters and characters include thought”, said Arnheim. “Art is made up of action and not forms”, continues Arnheim and adds that “the set of forms carries the painting”.

Todorovic carries this within his artistic being and extracts out while searching for the organisation of the painting: everything must be in its right place and nothing should stand out. Indeed, the first impression is that in his paintings nothing is in its right place and that everything stands out. Careful viewing shows that it is an organised chaos in which every detail finds its own place while searching for the unity of visual experience.

Todorovic organises paintings in series. It is like an *Anatomy Lesson*. He pulls out the bowels of the painting, spreads it out and emphasises it. He marks the puncturing points of the vital organs of the series and paintings; he points to what needs to be skilfully removed so as to remove cancerous sores in the tissue of visual layers, while he is also careful not to create a cavity in the artwork. Todorovic, a fine art surgeon and anatomist, is not doing this meticulously but in a sweeping manner and controlled enough so as to prevent side effects. If there is not something of a devil in God, the chances are, as Todorovic says, that God is indifferent. The devil awakens energy and God just grinds it down. I find this duality in the visual thinking of Rajko Todorovic. That is why his painting speaks out so that everyone can hear it.



Drawing, ink, 22x36cm, 1974



Drawing, ink, 32x43cm, 1980



Drawing, creon paper, 70x50cm, 1978



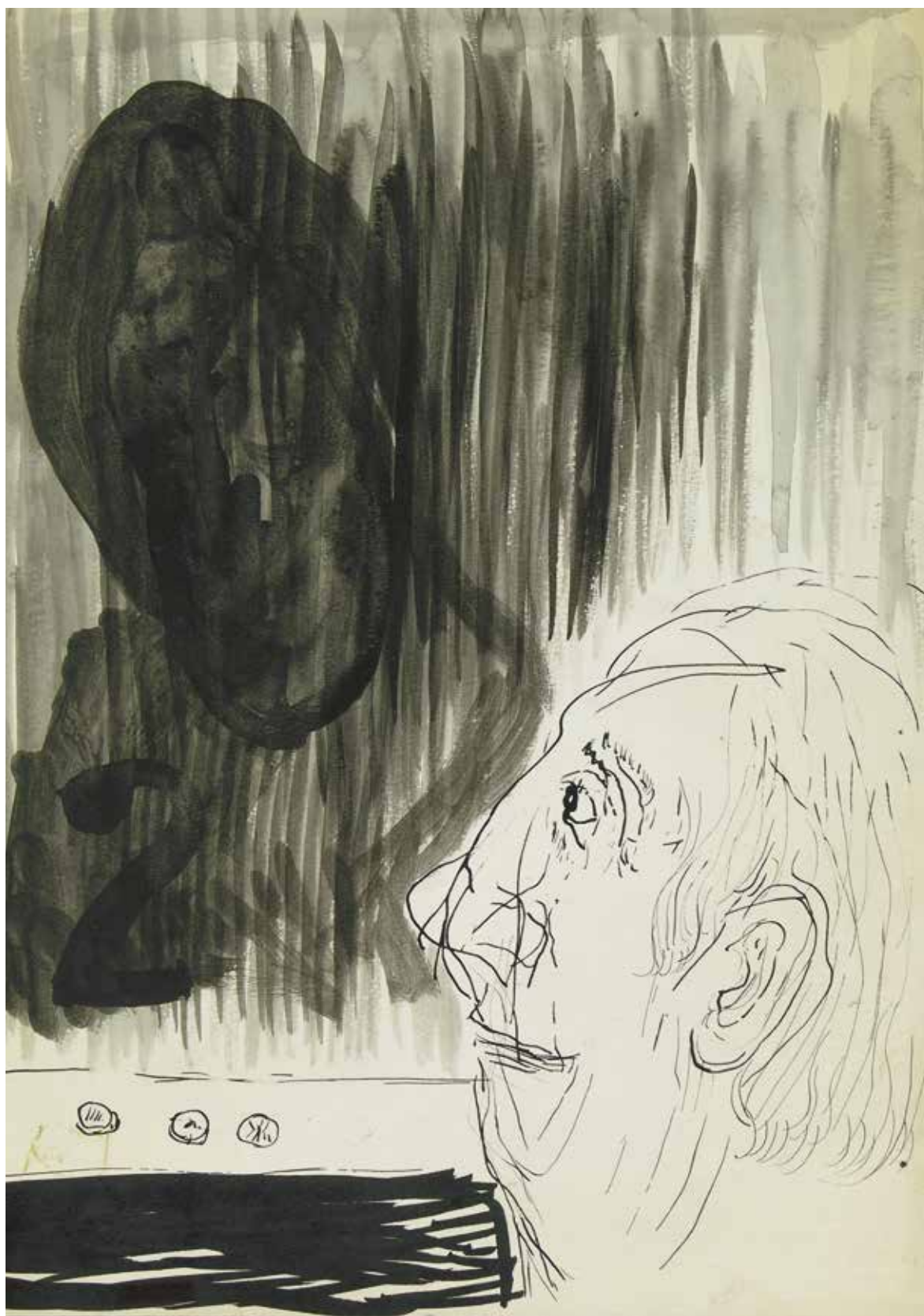
Drawing, ink, 43x95cm, 1984



"Beasts", drawing, 40x50, 1983



Drawing, ink, 30x42cm, 1976



Drawing, ink paper, 30x22cm, 1978



Drawing, comb. technique, 17x29cm, 1976



Drawing, comb. technique, 38,5x47cm, 1978



Drawing, ink, 50x35cm, 1976



Drawing, ink, 50x35cm, 1976



Drawing, ink, 70x50cm, 1985



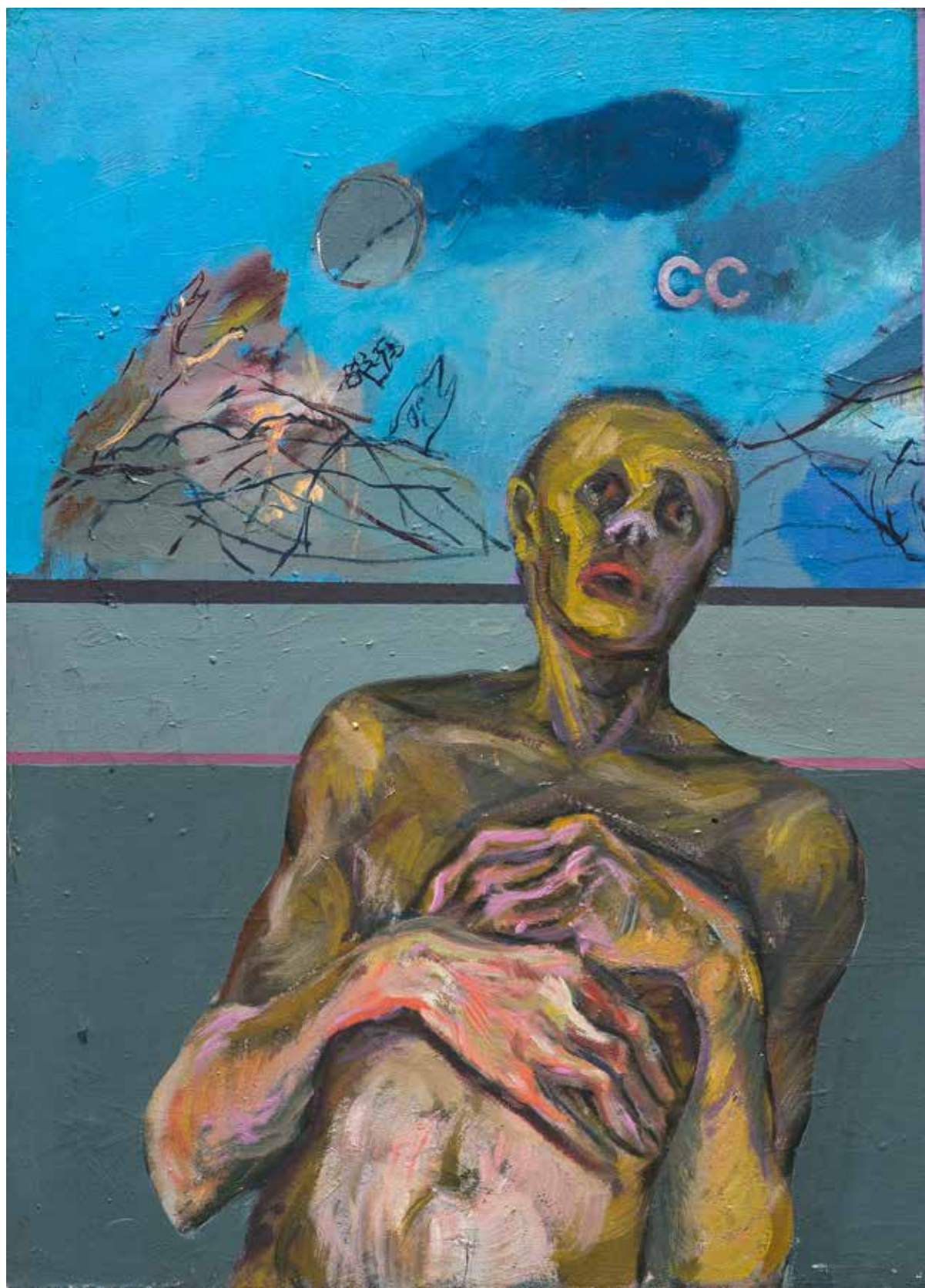
Drawing, comb. technique, 80x50cm, 1980



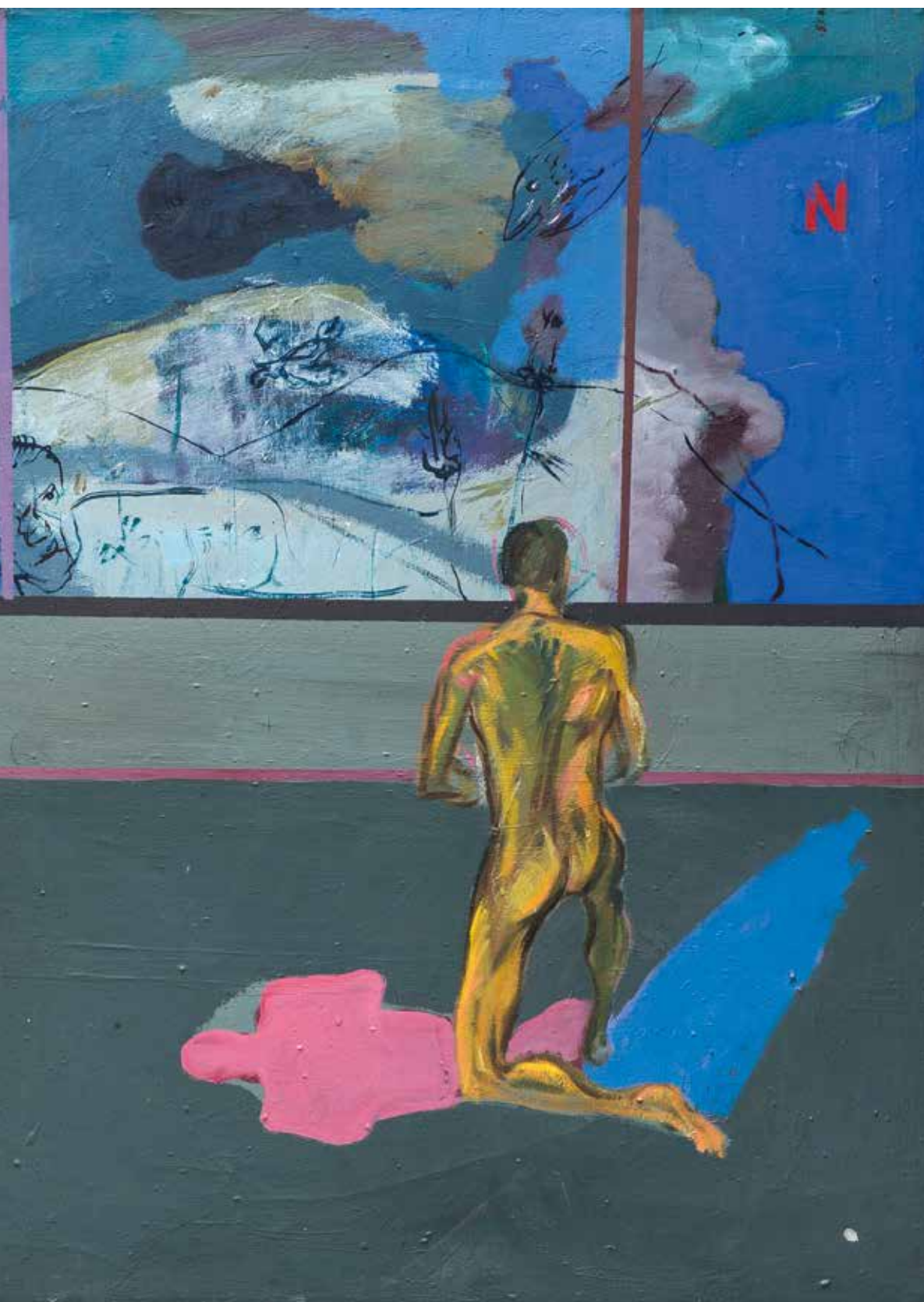
Drawing, ink paper, 15x19cm, 1984

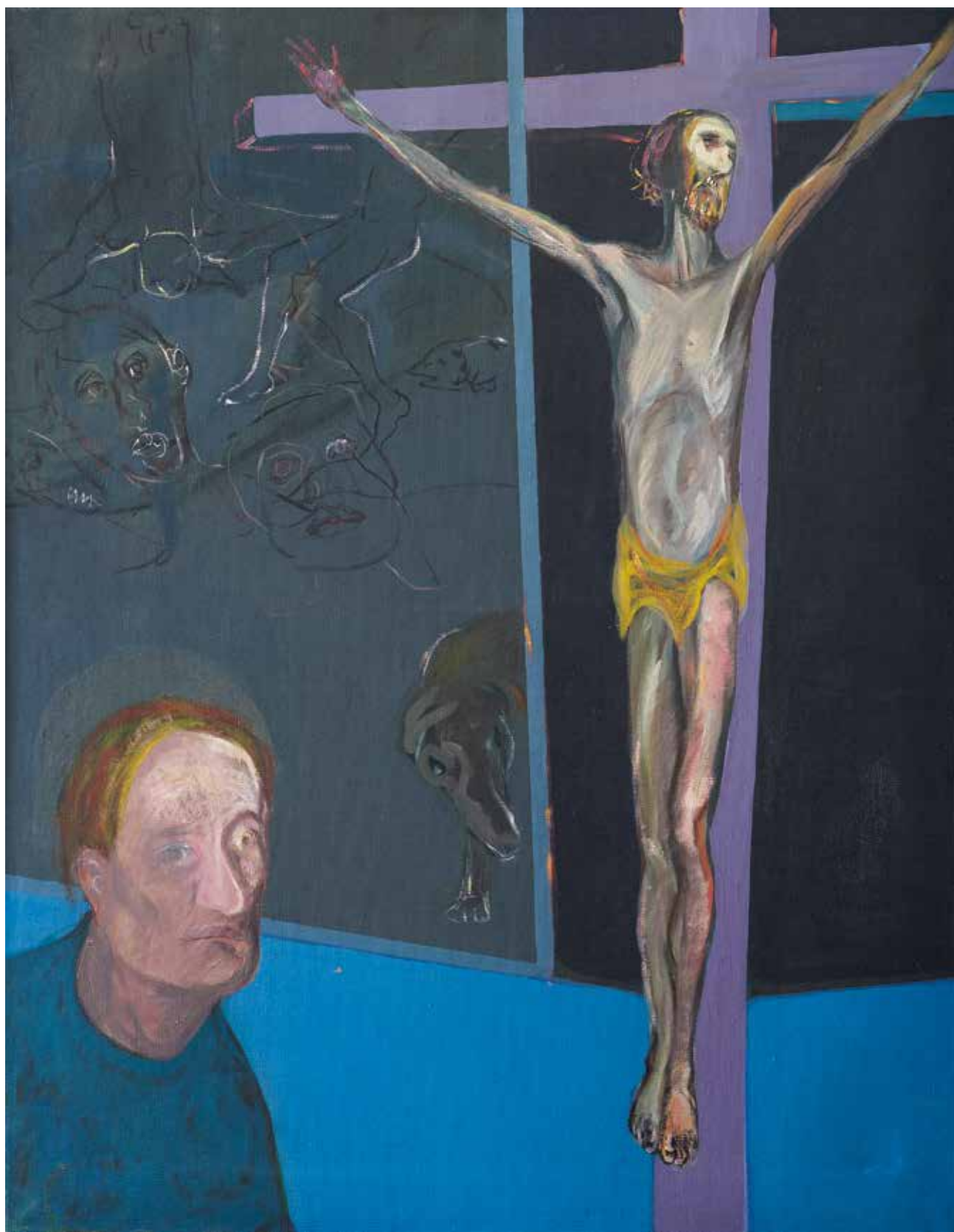


"Beasts", drawing, 40x50cm, 1983



"Relations I", oil on canvas, 80x100cm, 1979

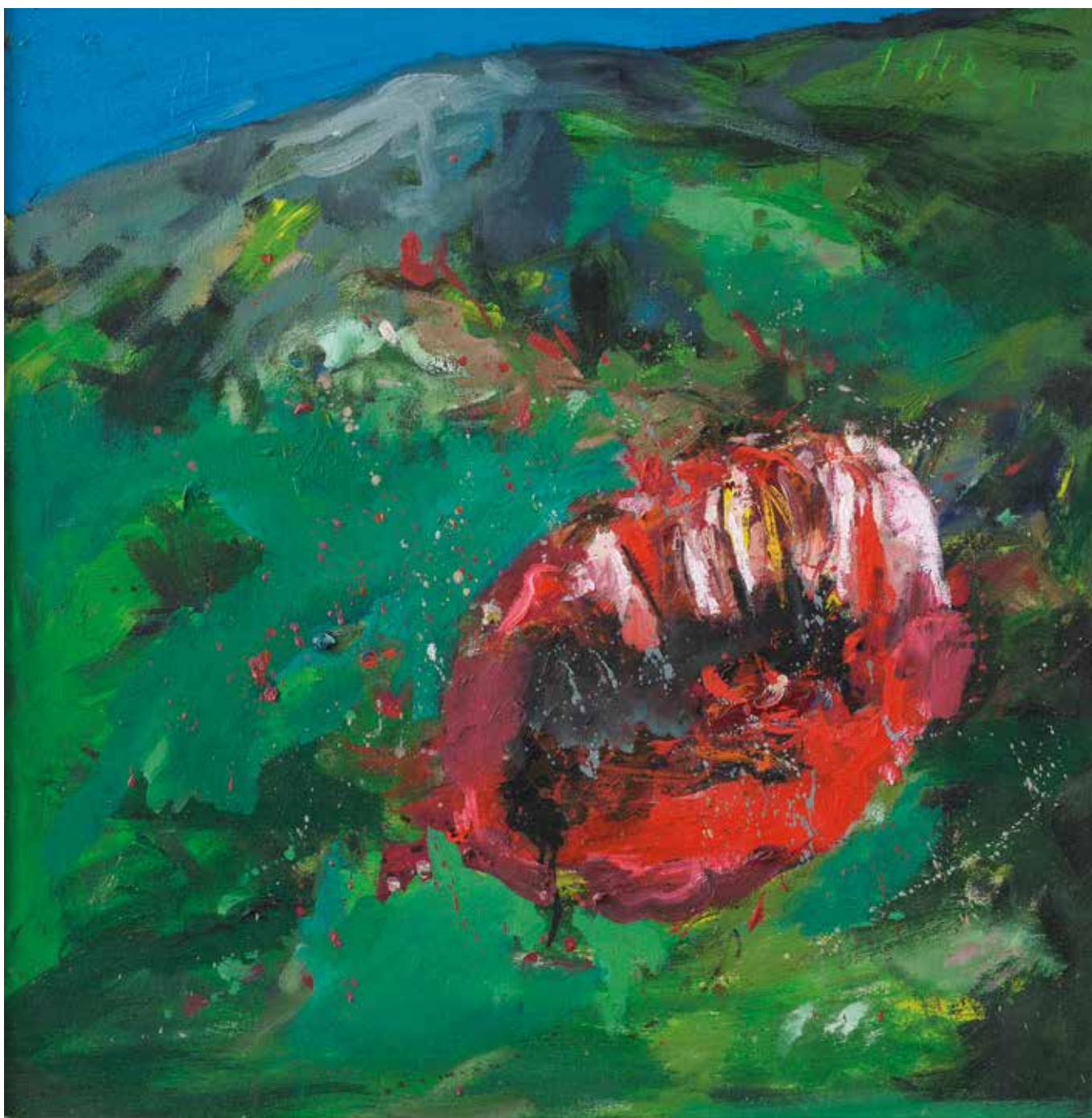




"Scenes", oil on canvas, 100x80cm, 1980



"Beasts", acrylic, 30x44cm, 1984



“Terra Terabilita”, acrylic, 70x80cm, 1993



"Krnovo", acrylic, 70x50cm, 1992



"Krnovo", oil on cardboard, 71x59, 1991



“Krnovo”, acrylic, 50x60cm, 1992



Drawing, ink, 36,5x47,5cm, 1981



Drawing, ink, 28x38cm, 1978



“Mediterranean”, acrylic, 90x110, 2001



"Mediterranean", acrylic, 90 x 110 2001



"Mediterranean", acrylic, 90x110 2001



"Mediterranean", acrylic, 90 x110 2001



Drawing, Ink, 38x23cm, 1986



Drawing, ink paper, 25x38, 1984



“Vucji Do – 9:30h”, oil on canvas, 185x155cm, 1988



"Vucji Do - 9:42h", oil on canvas, 155x175cm, 1987



"Vucji Do - 16:00h", oil on canvas, 102x300cm, 1987





“Vucji Do – 11:00h”, oil on canvas, 80x60cm, 1988



"Vucji Do", oil on canvas, 70x50cm, 1986



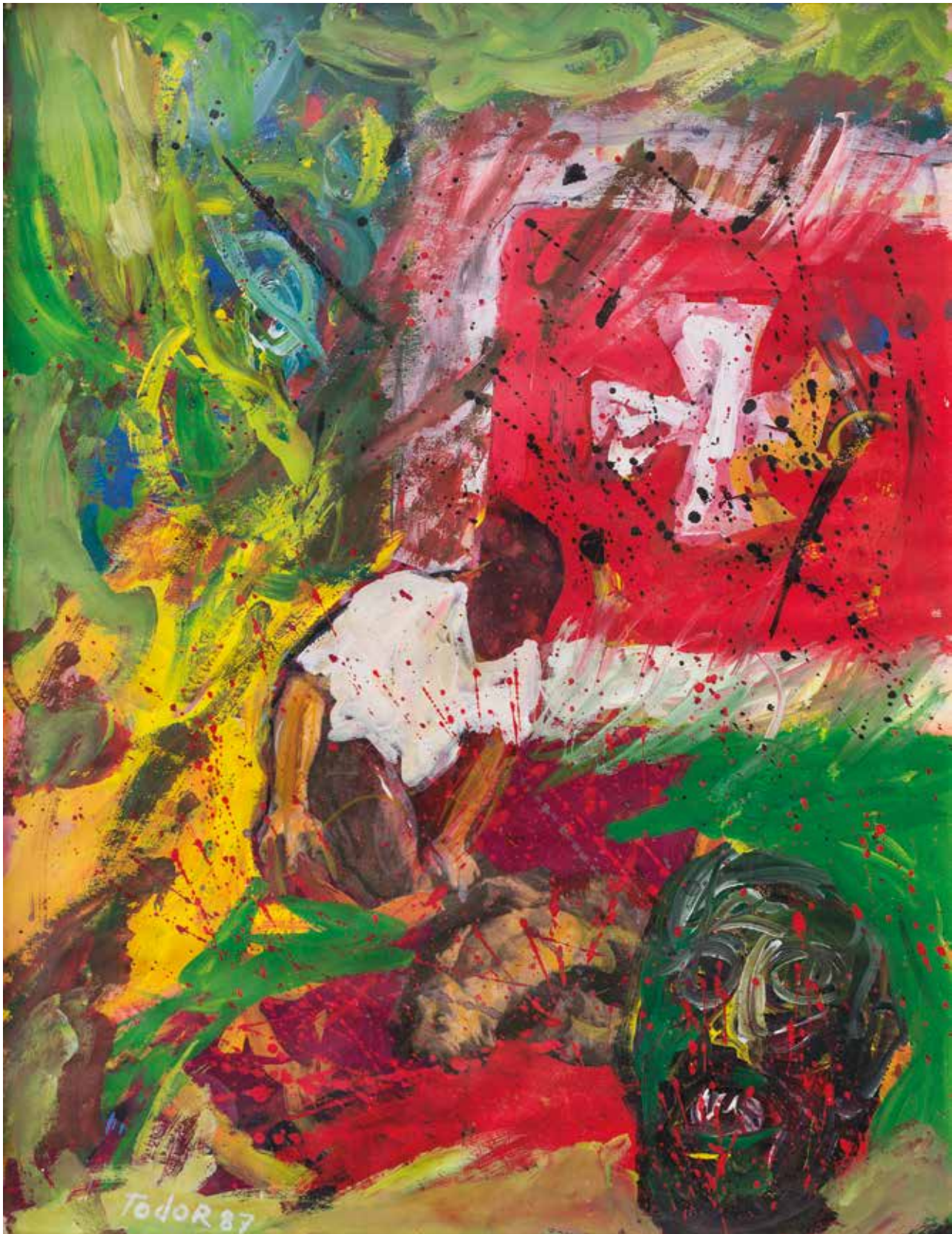
“Vucji Do – 18:00h”, oil on canvas, 105x140cm, 1987



"Vucji Do", oil on canvas, 70x60cm, 1987



"Vucji Do - 14:34h" oil on canvas, 195x215cm, 1987



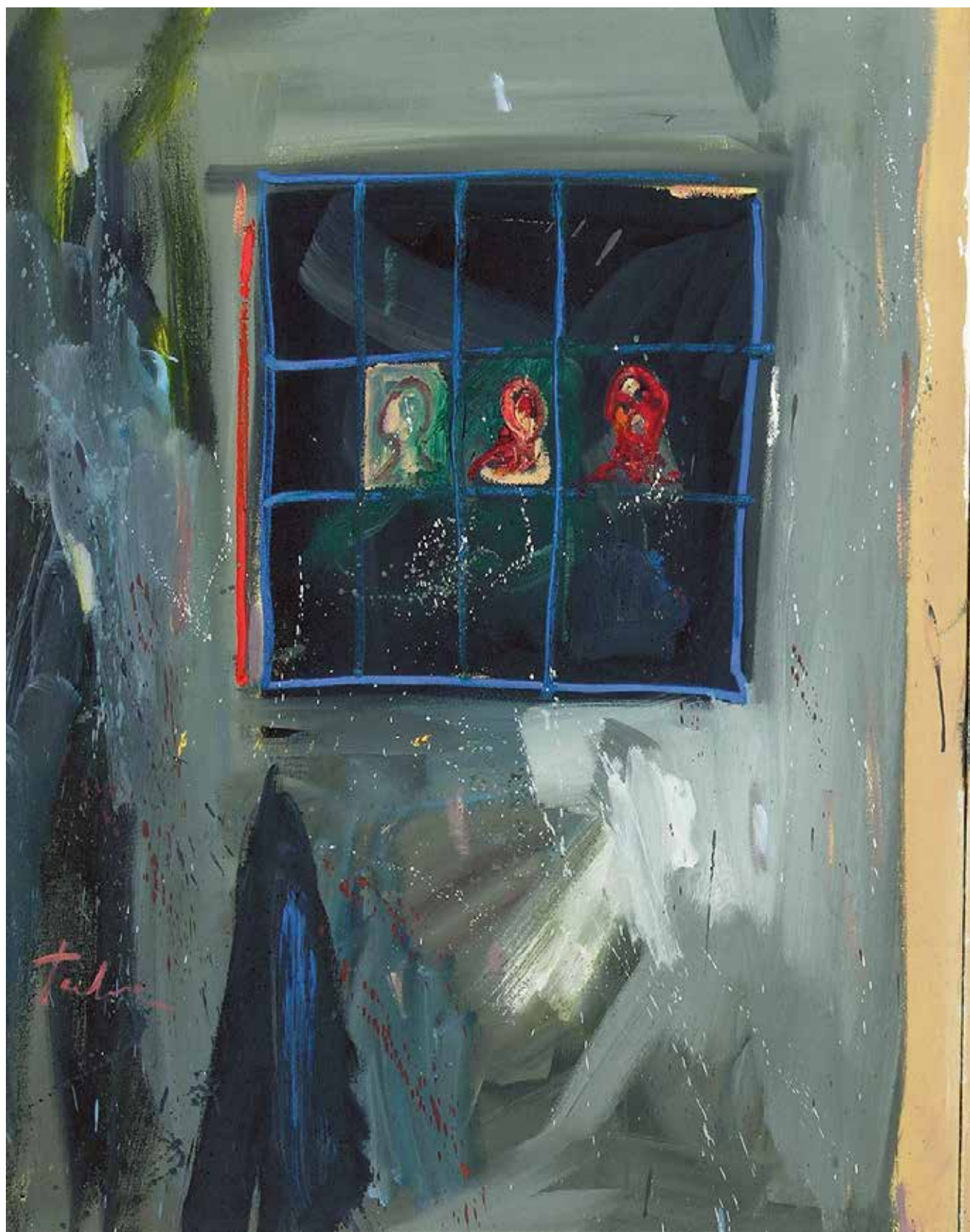
“Vucji Do – 07:05”, oil on canvas, 70x50cm, 1987



Drawing, ink, 20x30cm, 1978



"Faces", gouache, 11x17cm, 1977

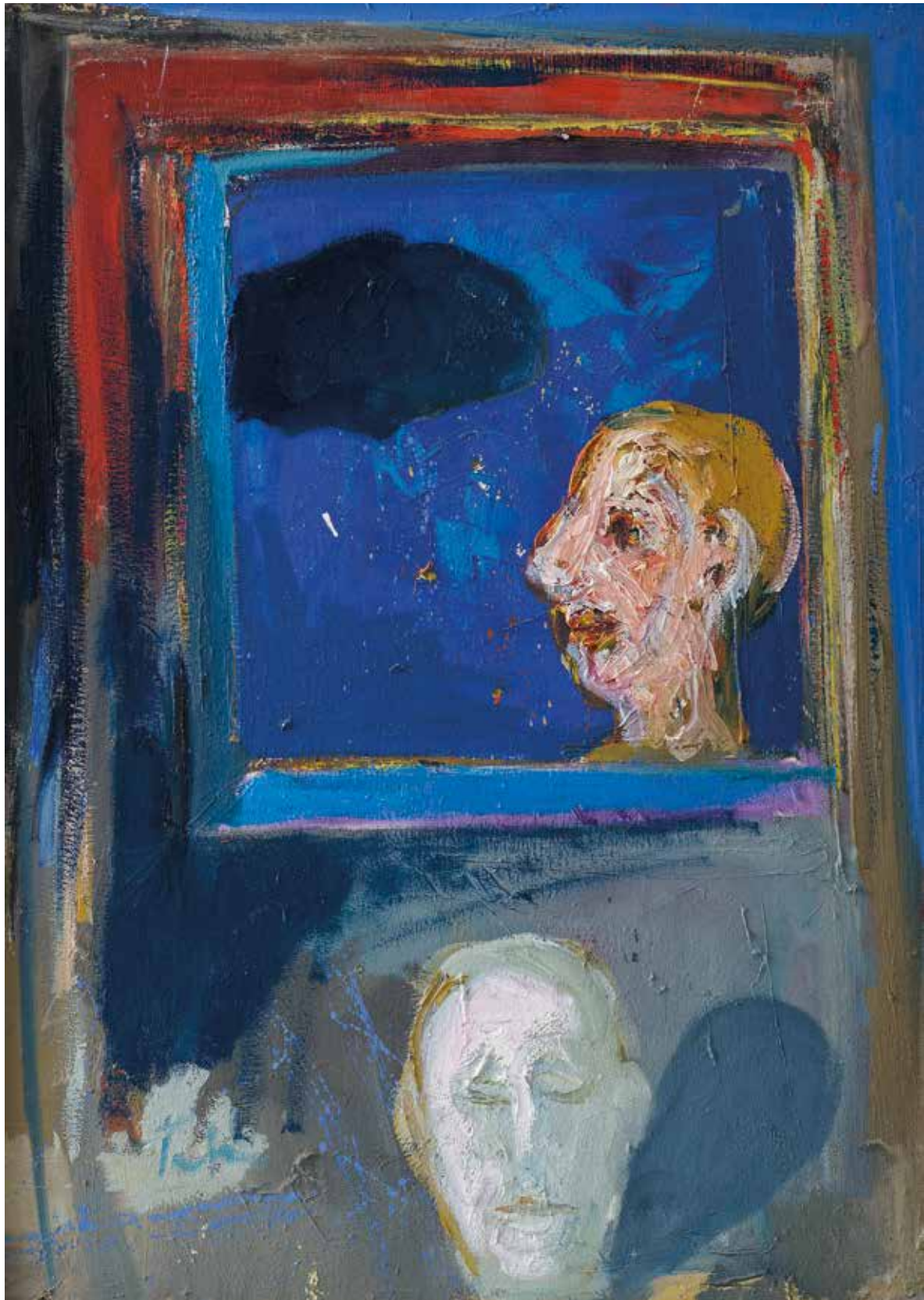


"Relations II", oil on canvas, 100x160cm, 1999

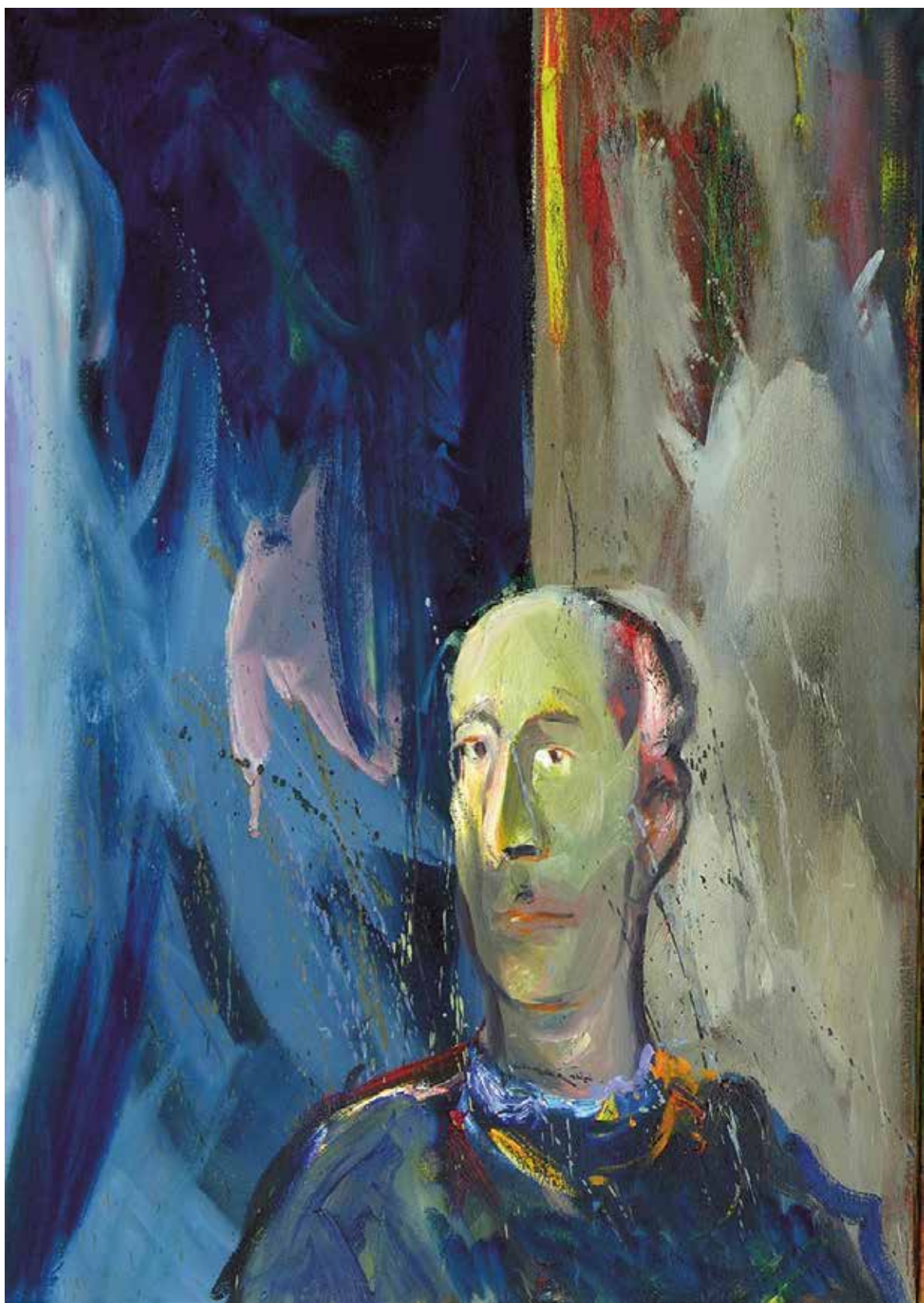




“Relations II”, oil on canvas, 50x50cm, 1997

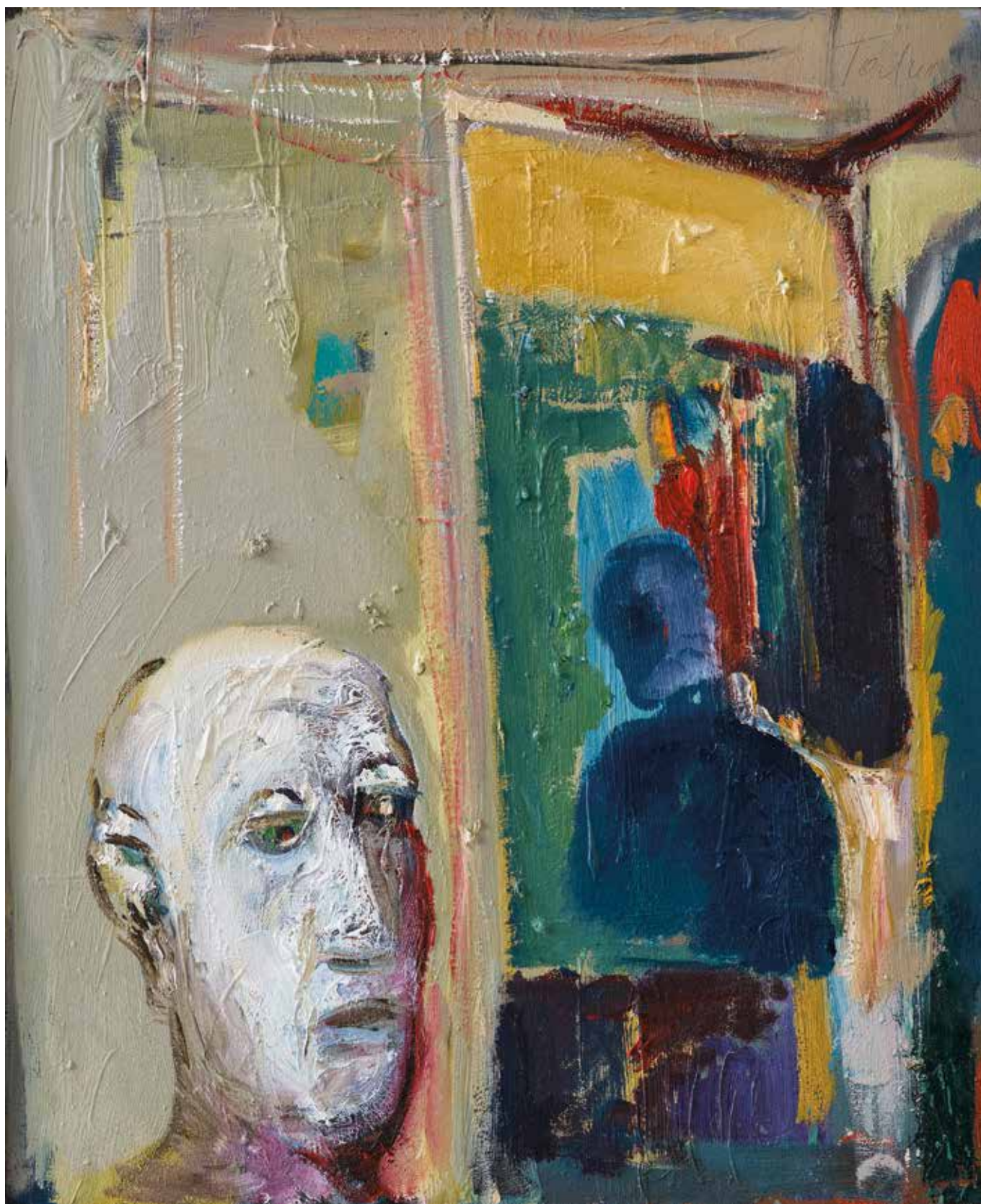


"Relations II", oil on canvas, 70x100cm, 2000



"Relations II", oil on canvas, 100x160cm, 1999





“Relations II”, oil on canvas, 70x50cm, 2003



“Relations II”, oil on canvas, 56x42cm, 2003



"Relations II", oil on canvas, 150x190cm, 1998



“Relations II”, oil on canvas, 131x161cm, 2002



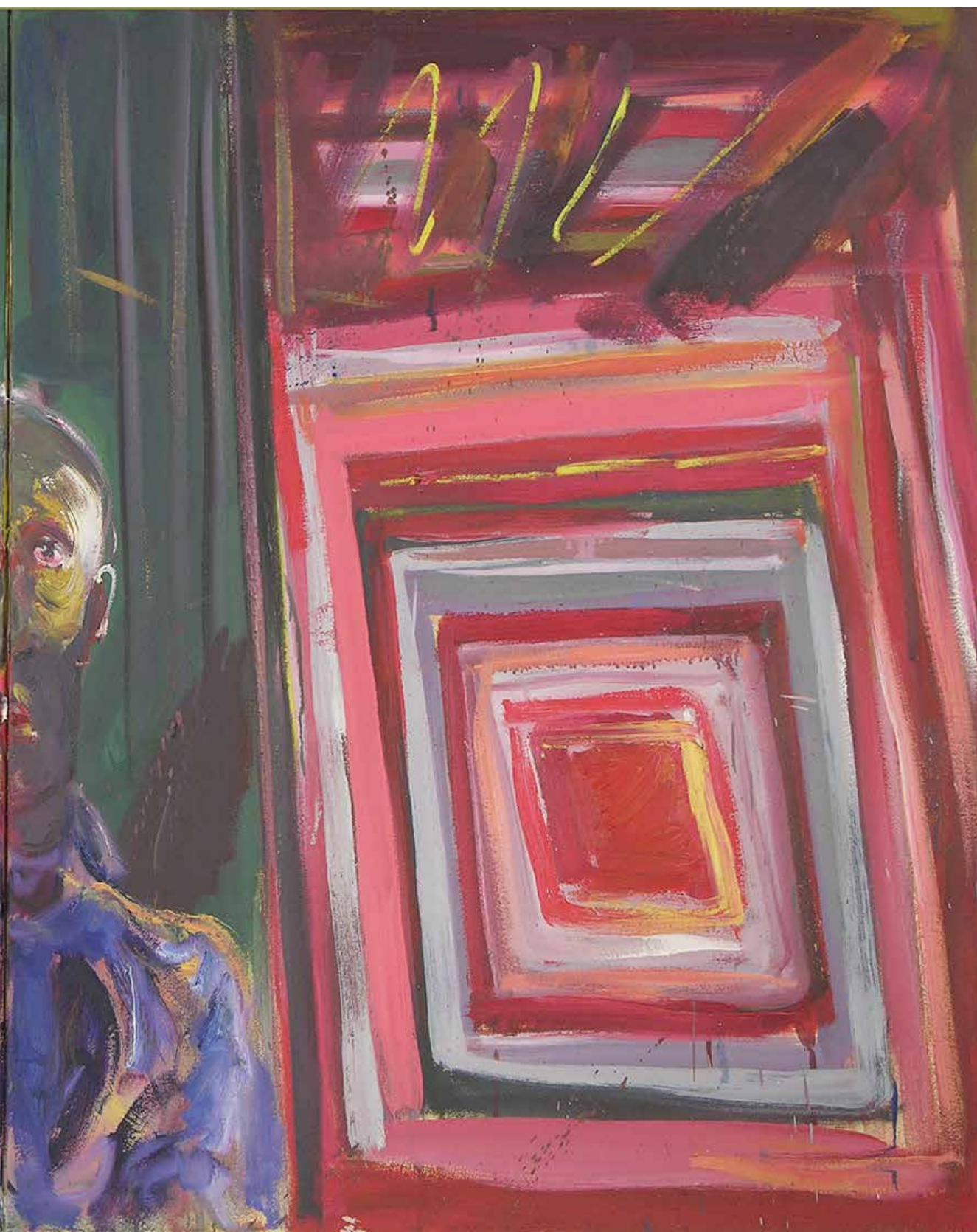
"Relations II", oil on canvas, 50x70cm, 2001

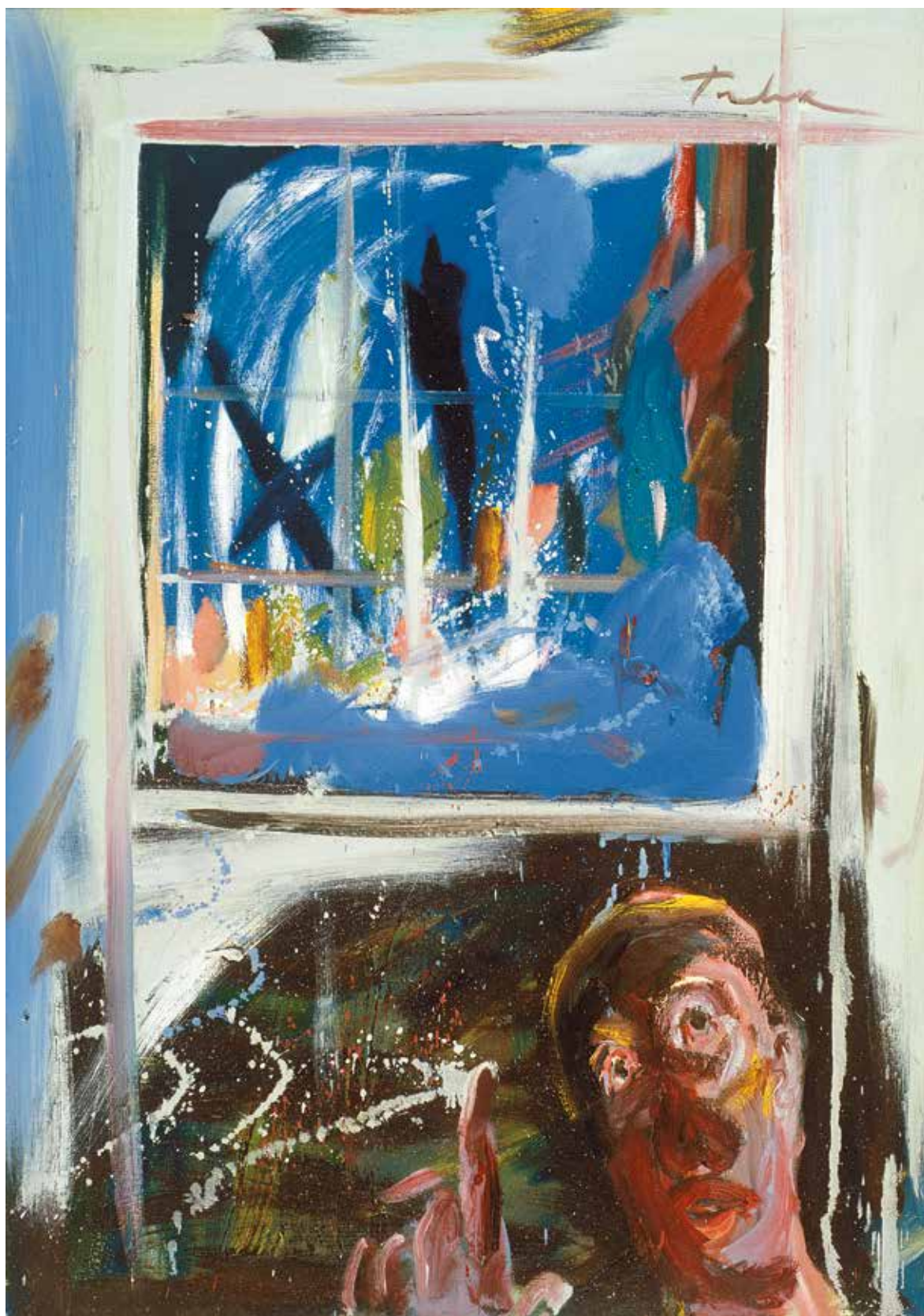


"Relations II", oil on canvas, 70x50cm, 2001



“Relations II”, oil on canvas, 100x140cm, 1998





“Relations II”, oil on canvas, 100x70cm, 1998



"Relations II", oil on canvas, 100x70cm, 1999



"Relations II", oil on canvas, 100x140cm, 1998





Drawing, ink, 17x25cm, 2005



Drawing, ink, 100x70cm, 2005



Drawing, ink, 100x70cm, 2006



Drawing, ink, 100x70cm, 2005



“View 14:00h”, oil on canvas, 170x150cm, 2006



“View 10:15h”, acrylic, 150x170cm, 2006



"View 16:45h", acrylic, 170x150cm, 2006



"View 18:30h", acrylic, 150x170cm, 2006



"Memory", drawing, 50x35cm, 2004



"Memory", drawing, 50x35cm, 2004



"Memory", comb. technique, 190x175cm, 2004



"Memory", comb. technique, 75x55cm, 2007



"Memory", comb. technique, 195x131cm, 2004



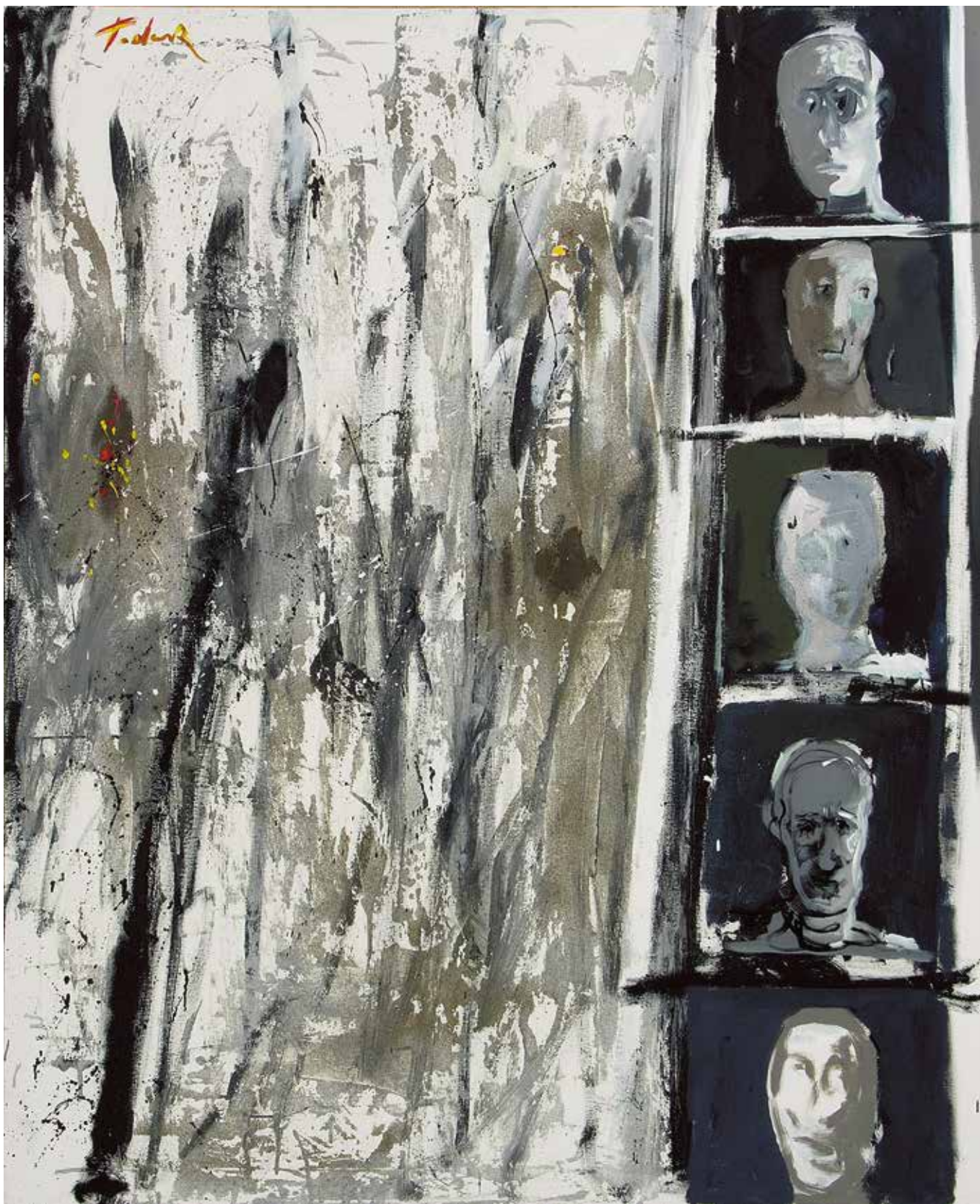
"Memory", comb. technique, 75x65cm, 2008



“Memory”, comb. technique, 75x65cm, 2008



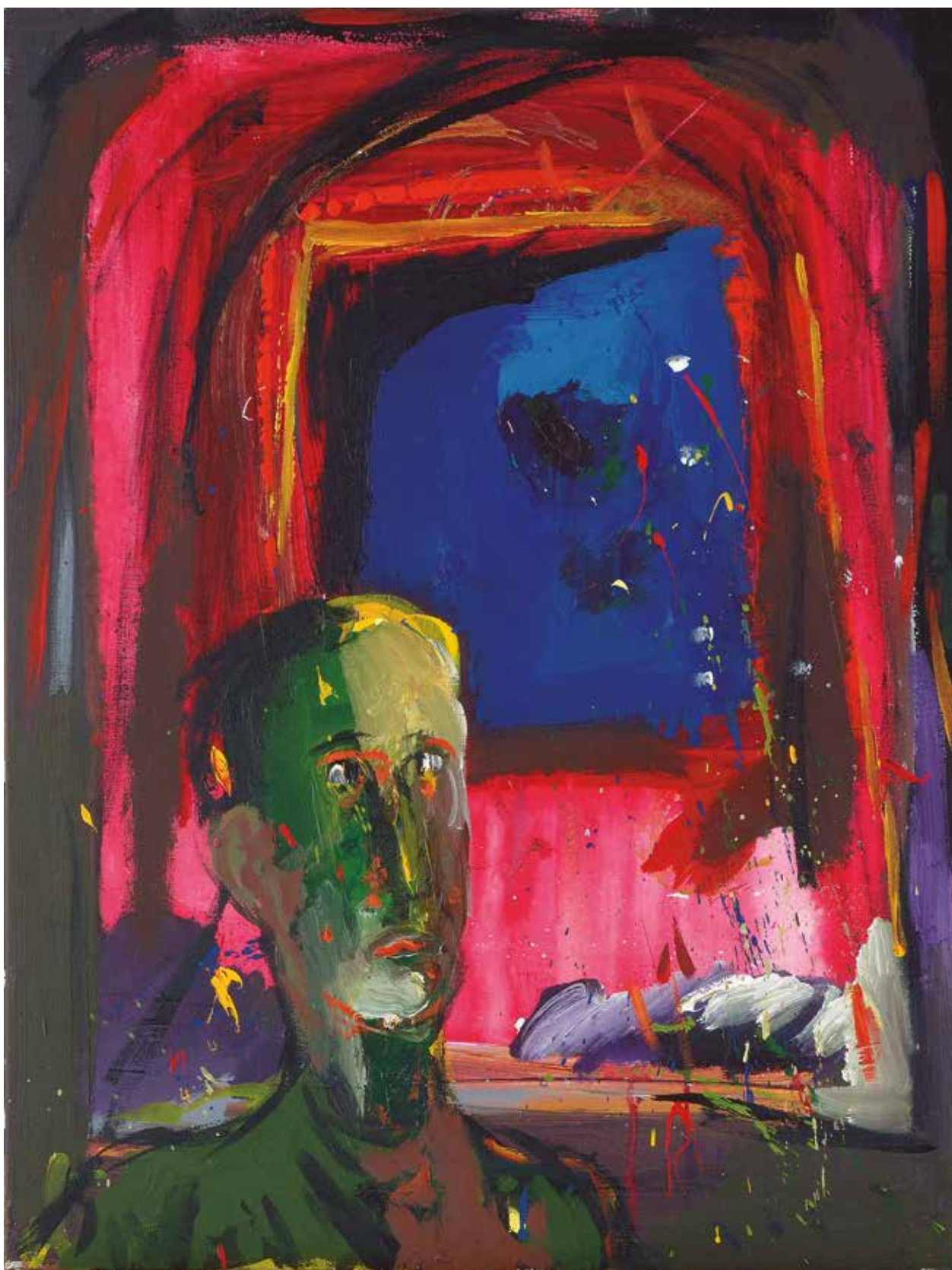
"Memory", comb. technique, 70x50cm, 2004



"Memory", comb. technique, 170x149cm, 2004



“Cage”, oil on canvas, 65x42cm, 2012



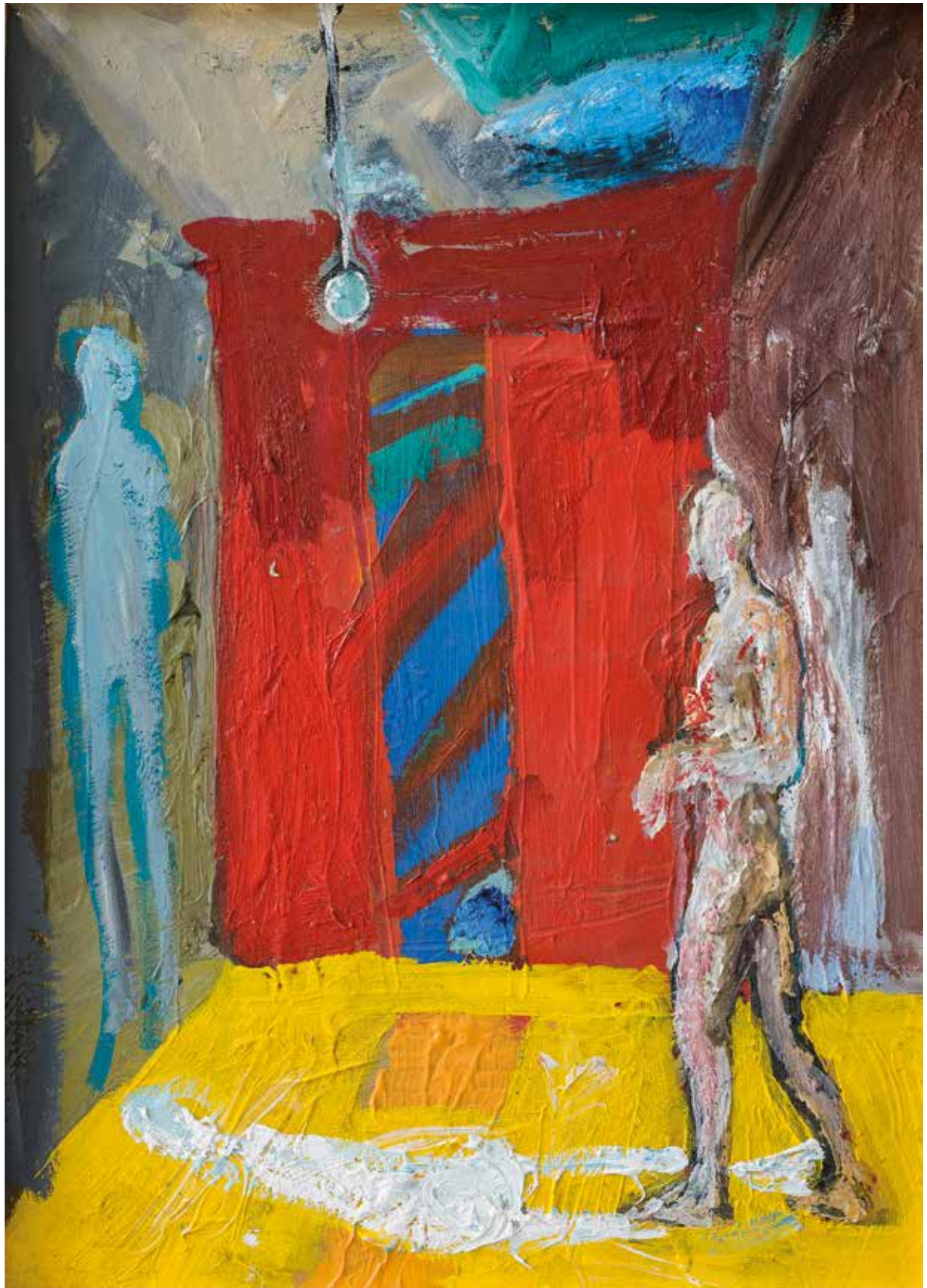
"Relations II", oil on canvas, 80x60cm, 2005



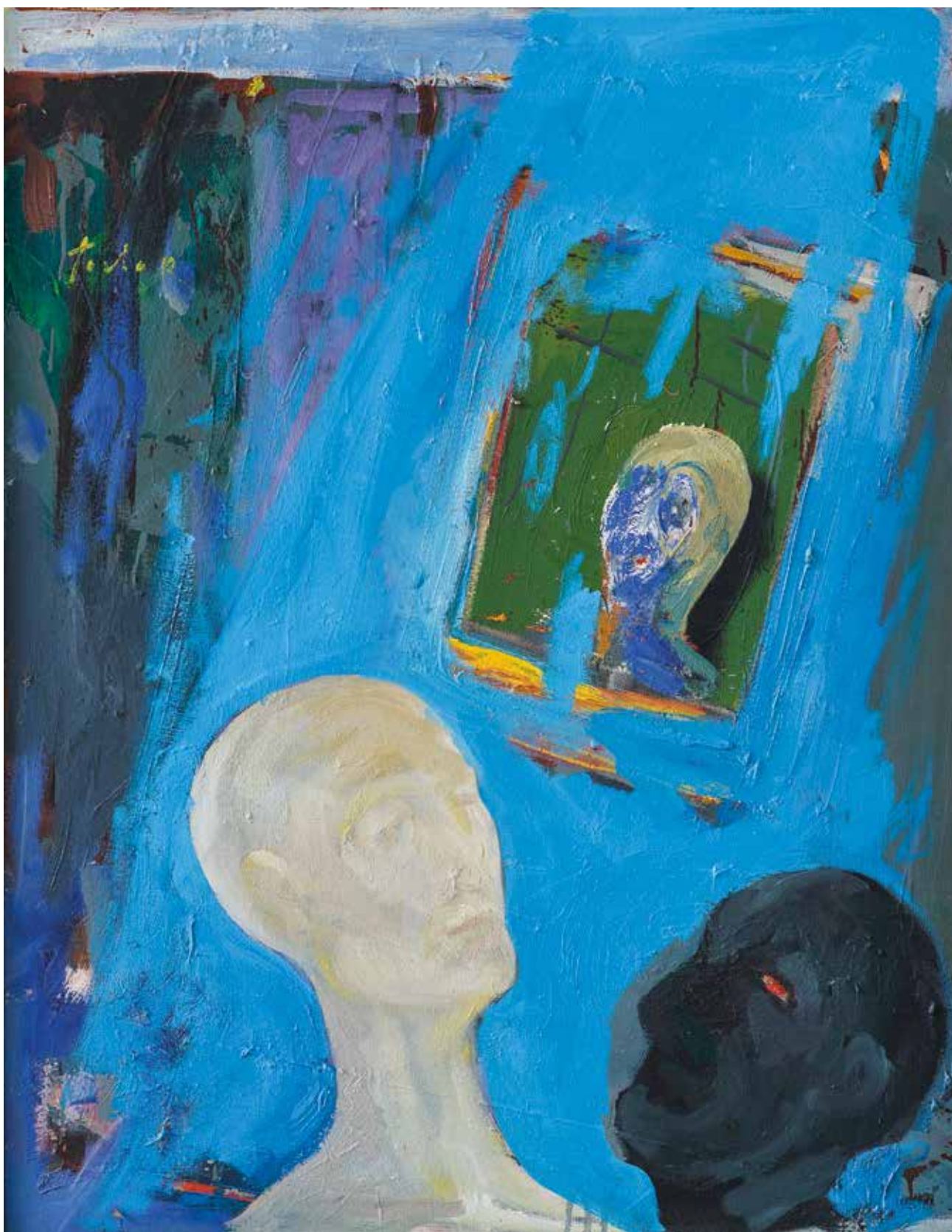
“Cage”, oil on canvas, 52x28cm, 2011



"Adam and Eve", oil on canvas, 60x40cm, 2010



"Adam and Eve", oil on canvas, 61x43cm, 2010



“Cage”, oil on canvas, 100x70cm, 2013



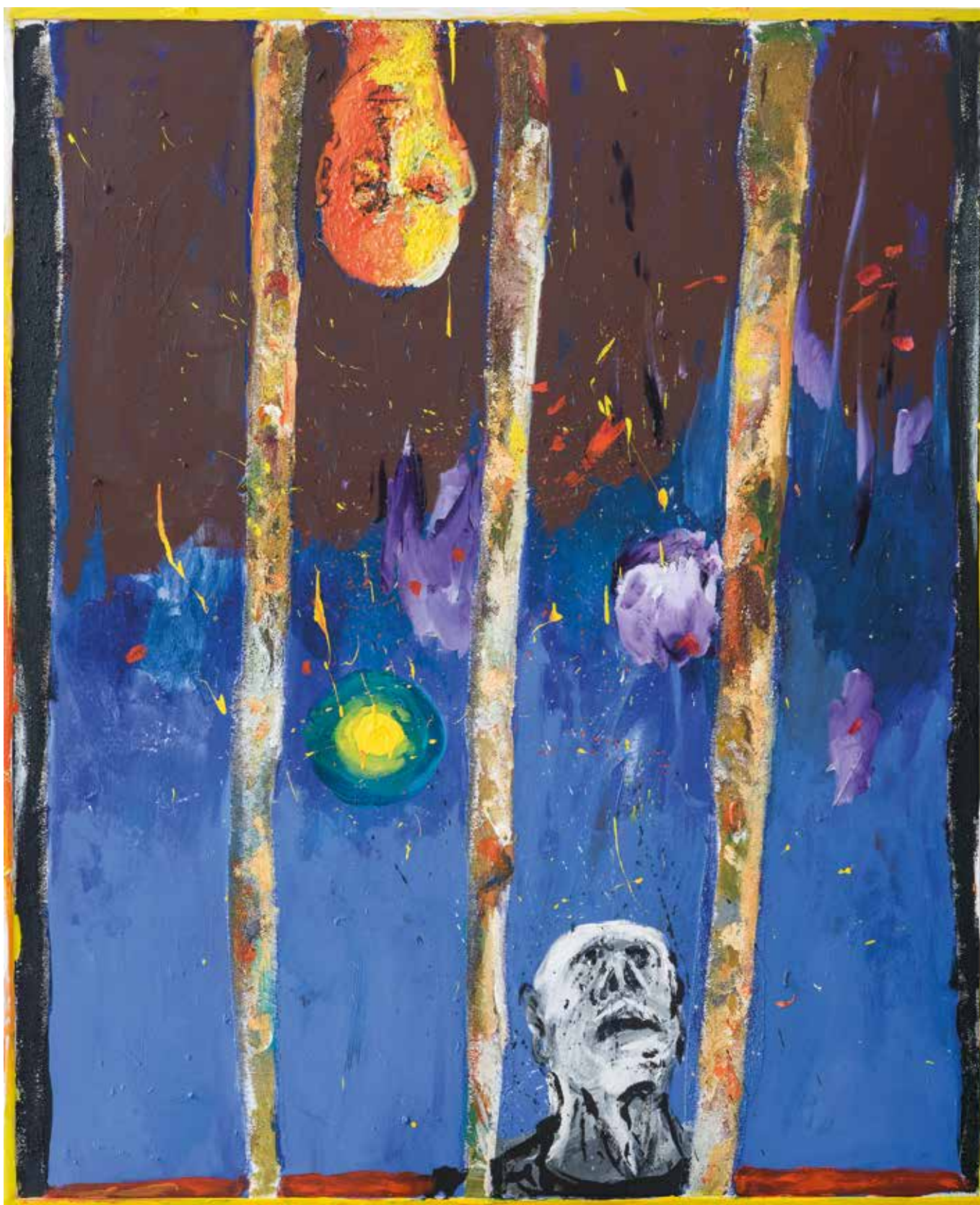
"Cage", oil on canvas, 100x70cm, 2013



“Cage”, oil on canvas, 80x55cm, 2014



"Cage", oil on canvas, 52x35cm, 2012



"Cage", oil on canvas, 170x140cm, 2016



“Orevuar Montenegro”, drawing, 40x35cm, 2011



“Orevuar Montenegro”, drawing, 40x35cm, 2011



“Orevuar Montenegro”, drawing, 40x35cm, 2011



"Sole Mio", comb. technique, 161x131cm, 2004



"Sole Mio", comb. technique, 161x131cm, 2004



"Sole Mio", comb. technique, 140x170cm, 2004



"Sole Mio", comb. technique, 131x161cm, 2004



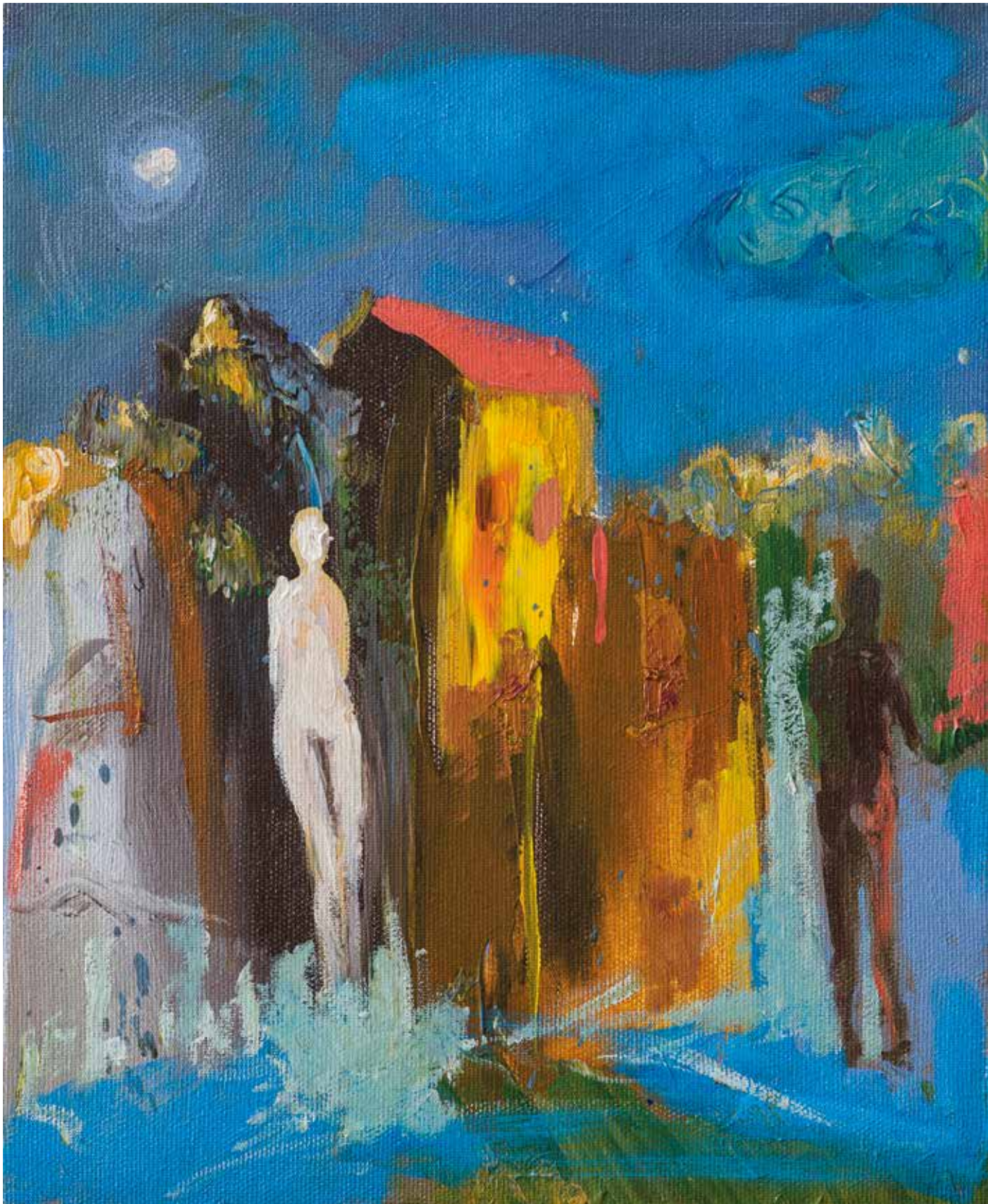
“B52”, oil on canvas, 210x190cm, 2012



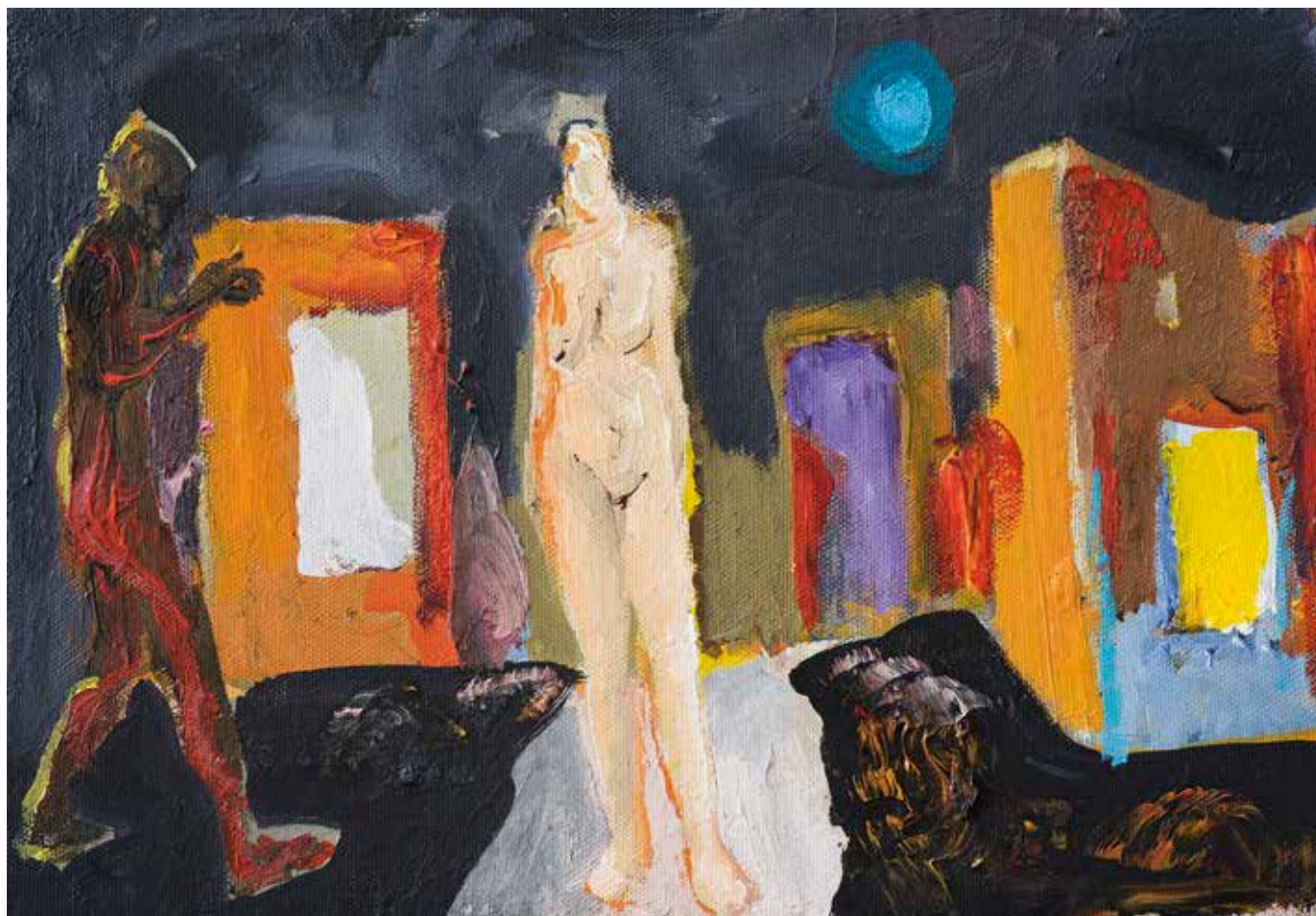
"B52", oil on canvas, 210x190cm, 2012



"B52", oil on canvas, 195x205cm, 2012



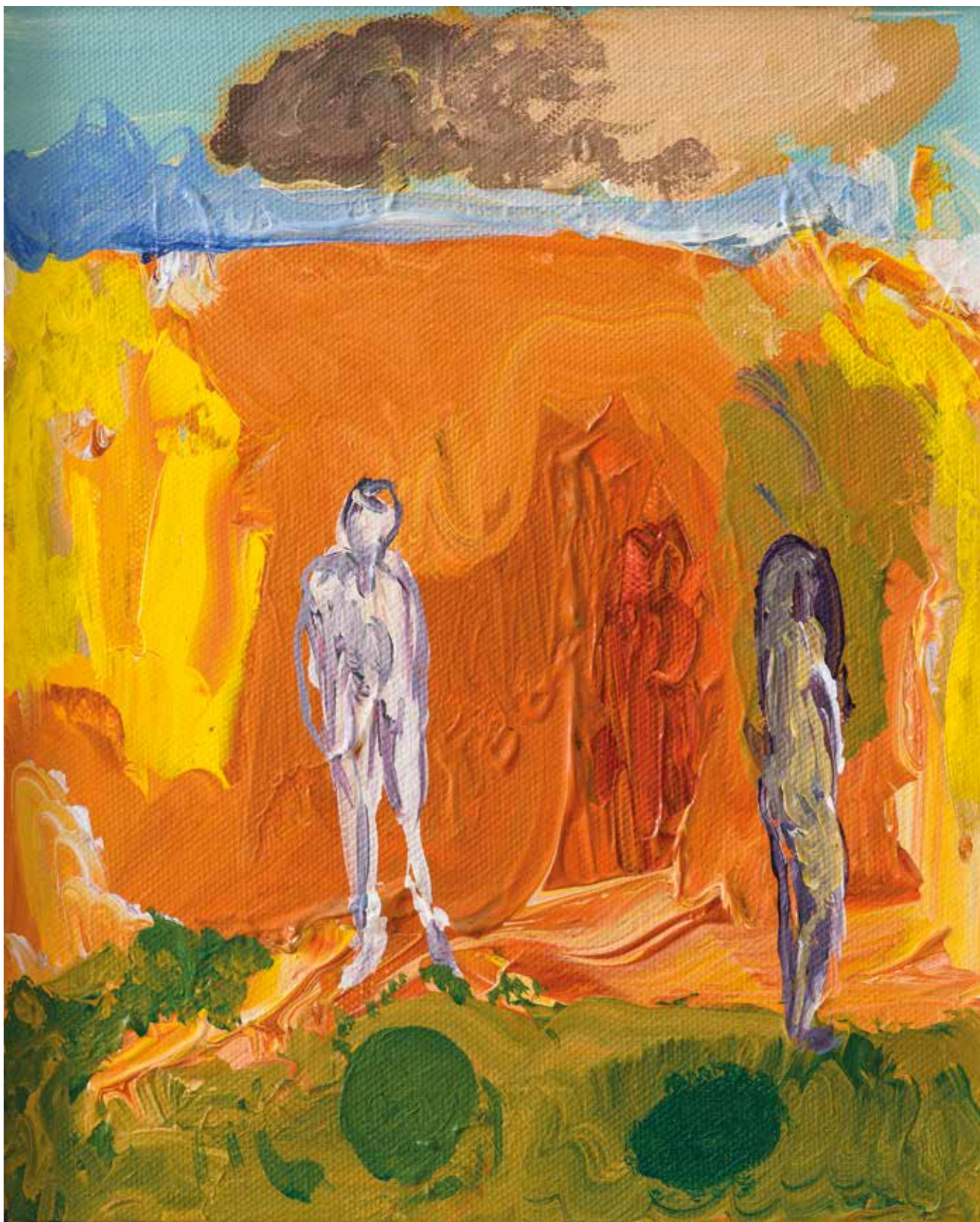
"Adam and Eve", oil on canvas, 45x32cm, 2010



“Adam and Eve”, oil on canvas, 18x28cm, 2012



“Adam and Eve”, oil on canvas, 35x28cm, 2012



“Adam and Eve”, oil on canvas, 40x30cm, 2012



“Adam and Eve”, oil on canvas, 50x65cm, 2013



"Letters to Francisco", comb. technique, 32x18cm, 2011



"Letters to Francisco", comb. technique, 32x18cm, 2011



"Calvary (Mirko Kovac)", oil on canvas, 190x150cm, 2016



“Calvary”, oil on canvas, 40x60cm, 2013



“Cage”, oil on canvas, 35x25cm, 2012



"Calvary", oil on canvas, 40x60cm, 2012



“Calvary”, oil on canvas, 70x100cm, 2011



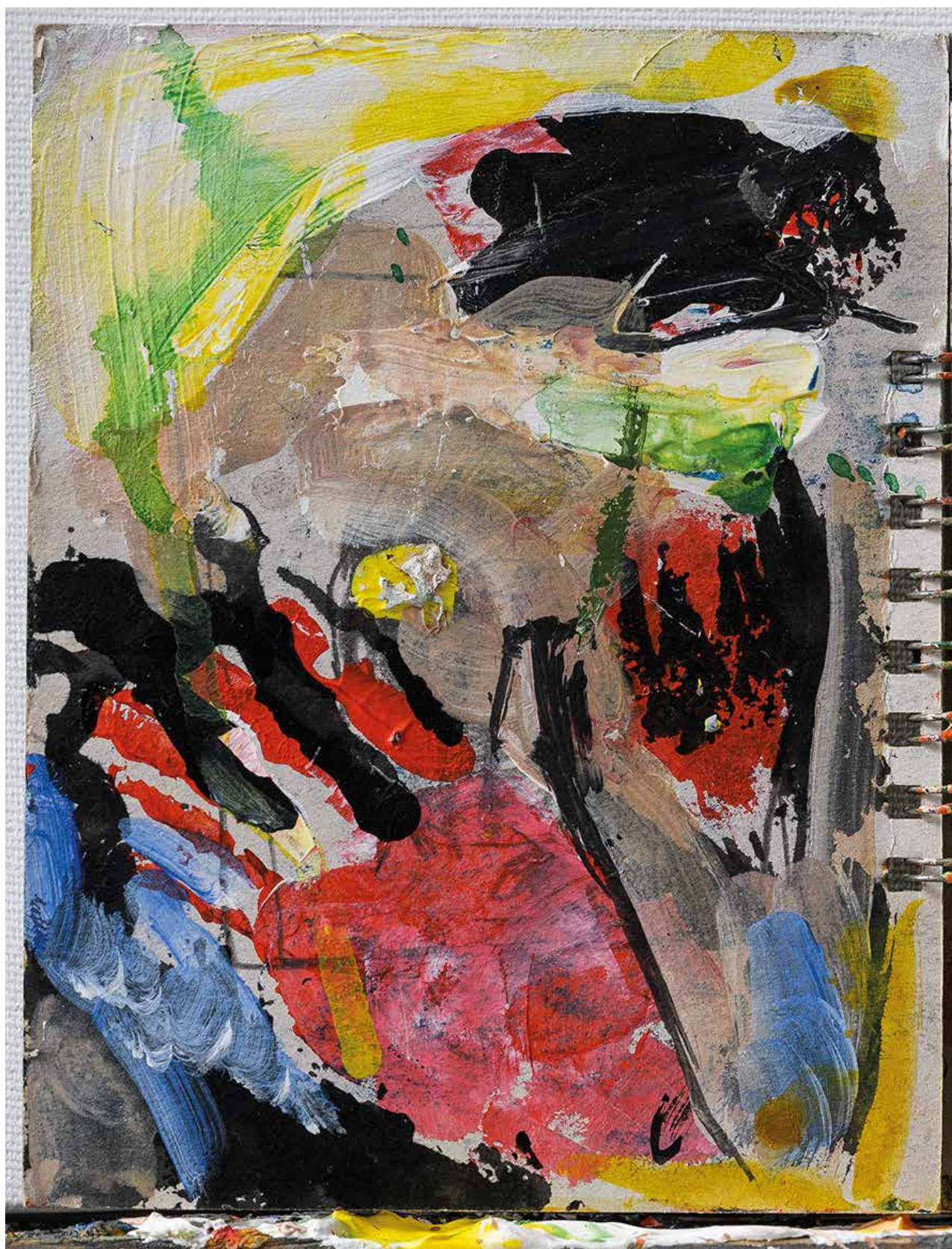
"Beasts", comb. technique, 50x70cm, 2009.



Drawing, ink, 70x50cm, 2006



“Beasts”, drawing, 40x60cm, 2005



"Last People", gouache, 14x21,5cm, 2016





“Last People“, gouache, 14x21,5cm, 2016



“Last People“, gouache, 14x21,5cm, 2016



“Last People“, gouache, 14x21,5cm, 2016



“Last People“, gouache, 14x21,5cm, 2016



“Last People“, gouache, 14x21,5cm, 2016





“Last People“, gouache, 14x21,5cm, 2016



“Last People“, gouache, 14x21,5cm, 2016



Drawing, comb. technique, 100x65cm, 2005



"Birth", oil on canvas, 60x80cm, 2015



"Birth", comb. technique, 100x70cm, 2013



"Cage", oil on canvas, 70x50cm, 2016.



"Cage", oil on canvas, 60x40cm, 2016.



"Cage", oil on canvas, 50x70cm, 2016



"Cage", oil on canvas, 50x70cm, 2016



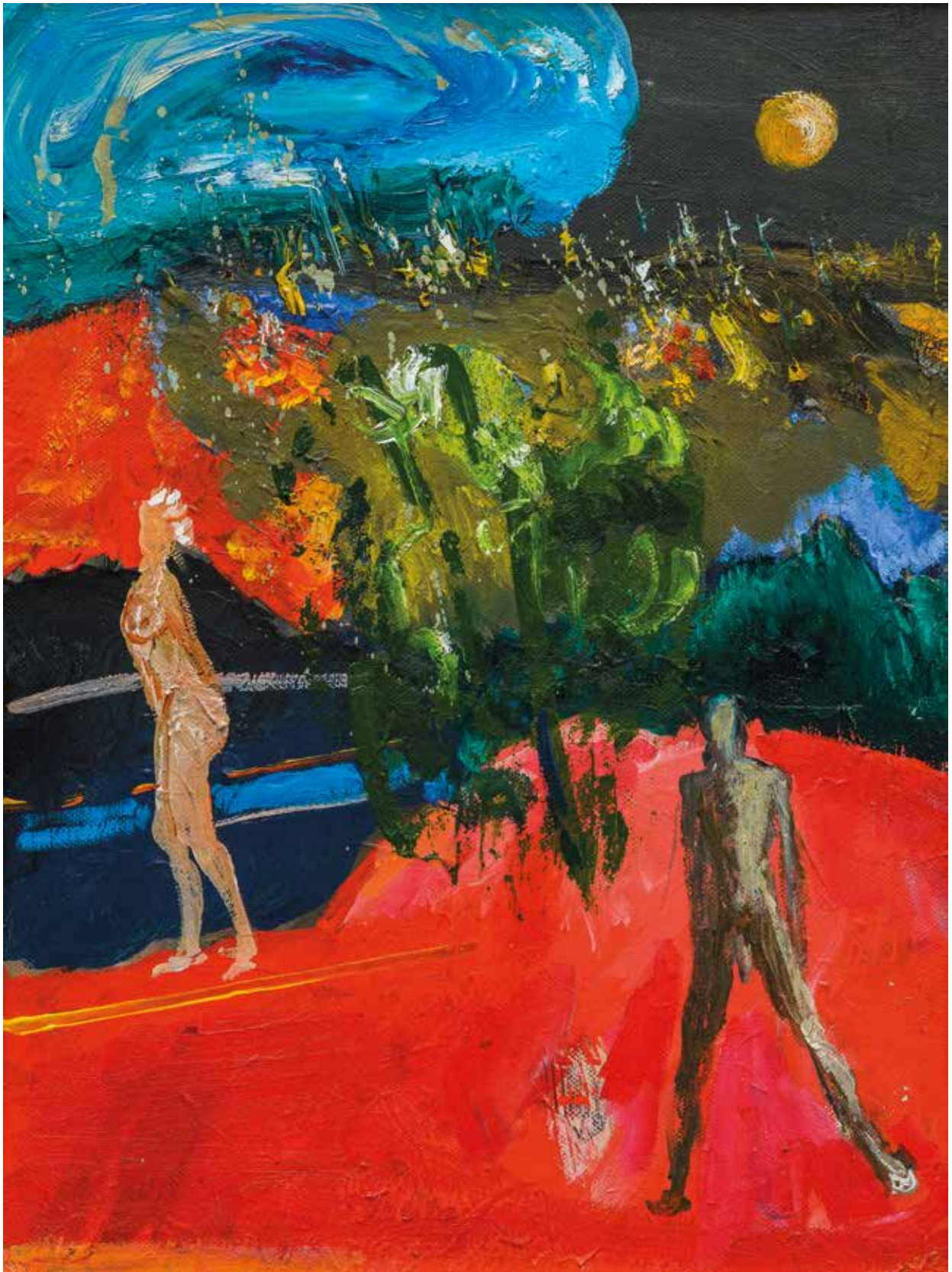
"Faces", comb. technique, 60x40cm, 2009



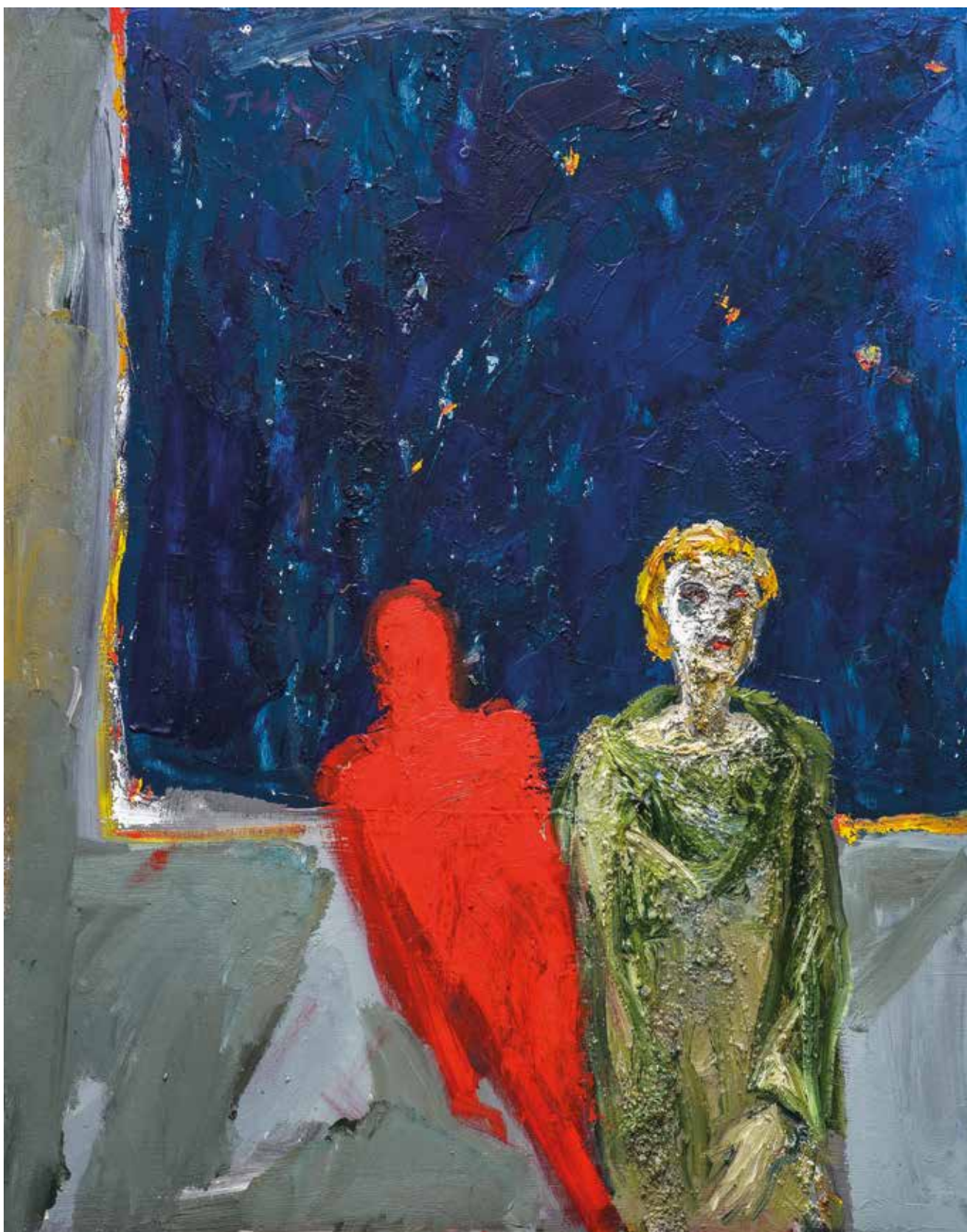
“Cage”, oil on canvas 60x40cm, 2010



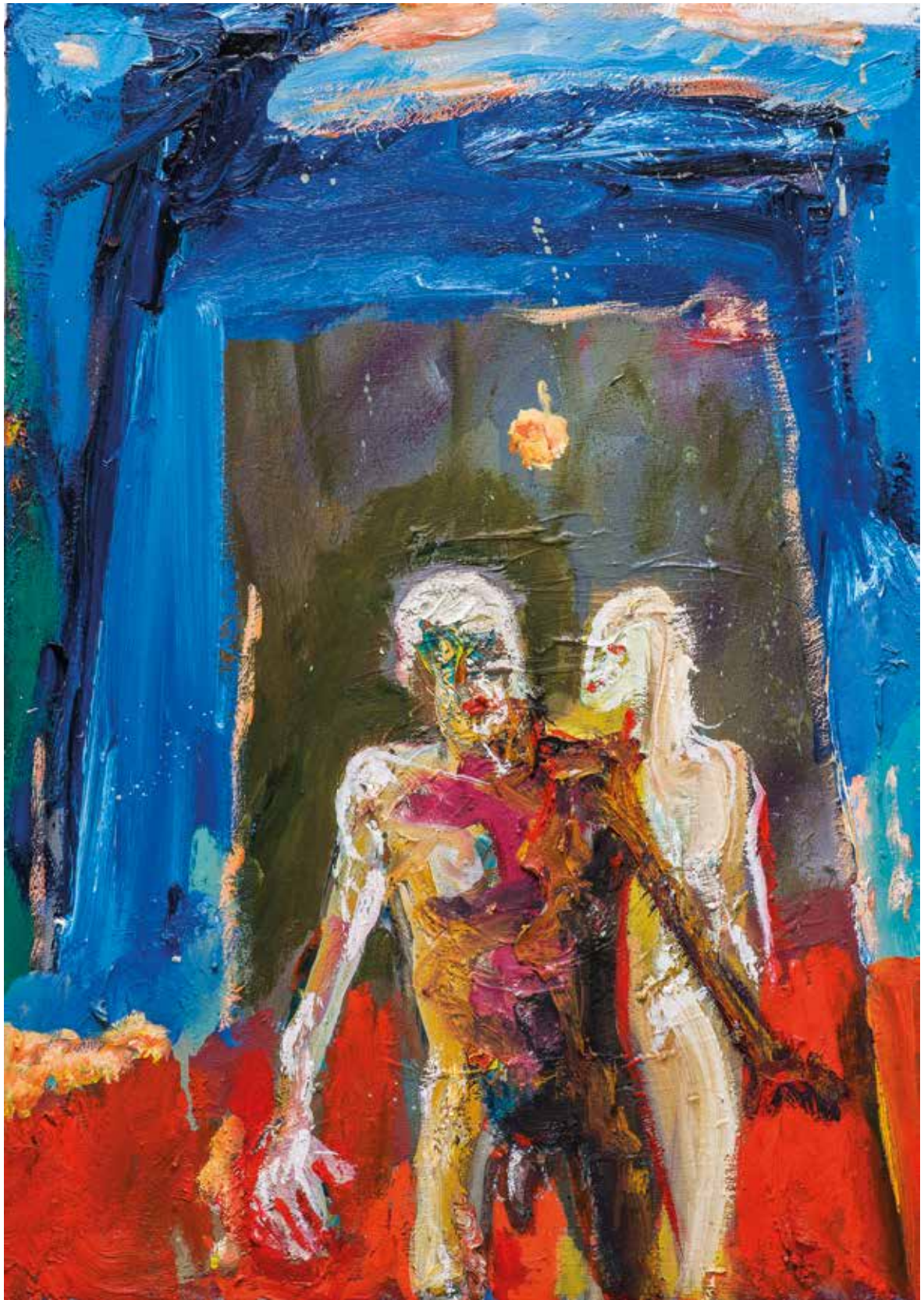
"Adam and Eve", oil on canvas, 45x35cm, 2012



"Adam and Eve", oil on canvas, 45x35cm, 2012



"Cage", oil on canvas, 70x50cm, 2016



"Adam and Eve", oil on canvas, 70x50cm, 2012



"Letters to Francisco", comb. tech. 32x18cm, 2011-2016



"Letters to Francisco", comb. tech. 32x18cm, 2011-2016



"Letters to Francisco", comb. tech. 32x18cm, 2011-2016



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"Letters to Francisco", comb. tech. 32x18cm, 2011-2016



"Letters to Francisco", comb. tech. 32x18cm, 2011-2016



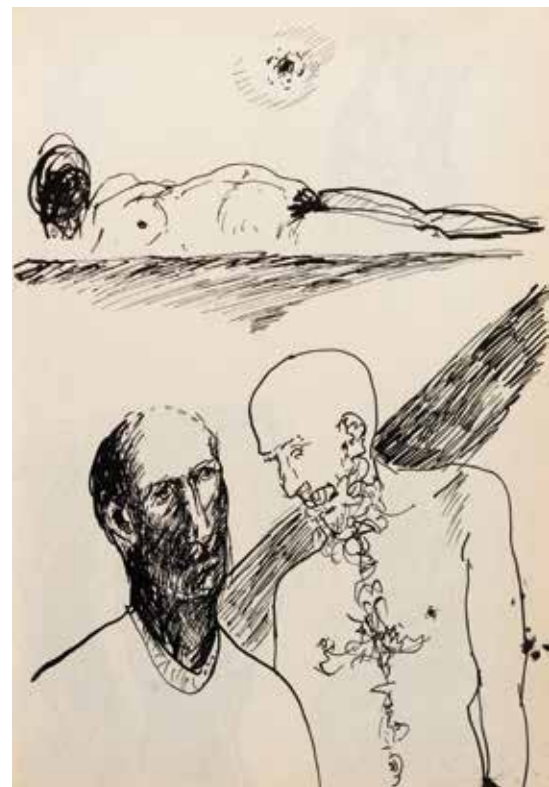
"Letters to Francisco", comb. tech. 32x18cm, 2011-2016



"Letters to Francisco", comb. tech. 32x18cm, 2011-2016



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"Letters to Francisco", comb. tech. 32x18cm, 2011-2016



"Letters to Francisco", comb. tech. 32x18cm, 2011-2016



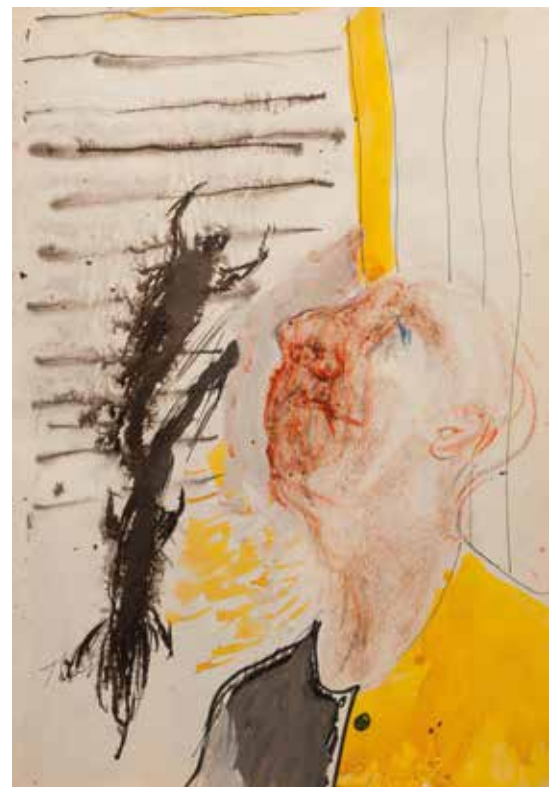
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"Letters to Francisco", comb. tech. 32x18cm, 2011-2016



"Letters to Francisco", comb. tech. 32x18cm, 2011-2016



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"Letters to Francisco", comb. tech. 32x18cm, 2011-2016



"Letters to Francisco", comb. tech. 32x18cm, 2011-2016



"Letters to Francisco", comb. tech. 32x18cm, 2011-2016



"Montenegro Mediterranean", acrylic, 60x85cm, 2017



"Montenegro Mediterranean", acrylic, 60x85cm, 2017



"Montenegro Mediterranean", acrylic, 42x60cm, 2017



"Montenegro Mediterranean", acrylic, 60x85cm, 2017



"Montenegro Mediterranean", acrylic, 42x60cm, 2017



"Montenegro Mediterranean", acrylic, 60x85cm, 2017



"Montenegro Mediterranean", acrylic, 42x60cm, 2017

# SUMMARY

The work of Rajko Todorovic is a unit, and points to a formed artistic style which was hinted at right at the start of his schooling, and over time has been further developed. There are no sudden and unnecessary jumps or turns. All his works are logically derived from each other. However, it cannot be said of Todorovic's artistic work that it is calm. On the contrary – it is extremely turbulent, charged with energy that radiates and sparks. Every subsequent canvas or sheet of paper triggers new research and discoveries that enrich his artistic vocabulary.

Space and time are important factors in the work of every artist. Rajko Todorovic joins his research into series, or “picture series, because a single picture is not sufficient for him to express the entire breadth of the theme that is occupying him”.<sup>1</sup> It is like an anatomy class. He extracts the internal organs of the picture, extends them and accentuates them. He marks the important points of the vital organs of the series and pictures, pointing out what needs to be cut away by skilful surgery in order to remove the cancer from the wound in the tissue of the artistic layer, being careful not to create a rift in the work. Todorovic, the artistic surgeon and anatomist, does not do this by prodding, but rather works in an extravagant way, but controlled enough to avoid undesirable effects. In fact, the motif develops within a typological model, in which colour and form play the most important roles. And besides this, he is not a mainstream painter with thematically narrow forms of typology, but rather one who follows the feelings which bubble up inside him.

The oeuvre of Rajko Todorovic ranged from darkness to light, rushing toward colourful explosions, which tightened and expanded, disintegrated and strengthened his painting. The end of his schooling and the beginning of his independent work are characterised by a stuffy atmosphere filled with expressionist resignation in which there occasionally flashed a powerful and wild flourish of colour. Todorovic was close to other members of “Generation 9” regardless of all their artistic differences, in, as Reljic remarked, “figurative expression”. He interrogated and formulated everything from portraits, human and animal figures, and landscapes, to abstract composition of the background content. He knew that visual thinking “rests on characters, and that characters contain thought”. He did not neglect symbolic arrangement either. On the

<sup>1</sup> Olga Perovic, Excerpts, An Exhibition of Rajko Todorovic Todor, Montenegrin Association of Fine Arts, Podgorica, 2000.

contrary, he devoted particular attention to it. “The satisfaction of the completed work”, or more precisely, of the series, was constantly evaporating away. It wore itself out on the road to completion, but at the same time once again flourished and developed in the following series, I mean – the series after that, actually the next series after that, and so on, forever. His work is characterised by irrefutable artistic logic through which



“People, People, Calvaries”, comb. technique, 210x210cm, 2012-2014

it follows the situation on the canvas, a situation that arises from it and in which there is no wandering. Everything is defined right at the beginning. It does not look for the genesis of its approach, but rather the inner artistic necessity which it carries.

Todorovic, through the relationships of form and colour, confronting the figurative and the abstract, makes changes in the symbolic and semantic, respecting the syntax of his own artistic language. A typical example is the portrait of Danilo Kis created from the memory of this artist which Todorovic retained in himself.

As far as shapes and coloured values are concerned, Todorovic's painting ranges from the dark colours of "Relation" and "Scene" to the higher effervescent register of "Carrion" and "Beast", with the colouristic and thematic construction being finally set up in "Vucji Do", with rich swishes of paint and playful figures that move in a multitude of poses. The way was indicated from here and the artist follows it introducing new flavours into his research.

The existing forms of the human figure experience various transformations so that the form in the "Vucji Do" series reaches its pre-eminence. Since that time, the changes in the figure are unsubstantial ones, primarily in the schematic of the body and face, as well as in the pose that slightly shifts depending on the contents. It is most robust in "Vucji Do", as the theme of the epic series requires this. Todorovic is dishevelled, but in approaching the picture there are no coincidences. All is known before one starts the act itself of presenting any motifs, whether on canvas or on paper. Depending on the moment in which the work is created, Todorovic selects the process of developing the composition. There is no essential variety in the already applied usage of artistic attributes and their interaction within the same unit. In the early phase the figurative broken expressive idea favours his artistic sense of that moment, after which the brokenness of the form is muted, especially in contact with sensations of colour, in which the composition comprises a picture within a picture. Examples of this approach can be found in the "Vucji Do" series, especially the representation of the flag as an independent picture-within-a-picture. It is similar in the works of the series "Memory" and "Adam and Eve", in which there is a fusion of two or more units. The process indicates that the composition of the picture-within-a-picture gives way to the unity of the many plans that make up the representation. Olga Perovic, after the creation of the "Vucji Do" series, stated precisely: "While some of his peers have adopted a more poetic refinement and have more consciously followed the methods of the world's leading artists, Todorovic, like Lubarda, turned completely to himself, to the world he originated from, quite genuinely excited about the changes in it and establishing a distinctive attitude towards tradition and contemporary life".<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Olga Perovic, Excerpts, April 1989, published in Rajko Todorovic Todor – *A Retrospective Exhibition*, Montenegrin Centre of Contemporary Arts, Podgorica, 2005.



"Faces", oil on canvas, 60x40cm, 2009

Todorovic releases forms that float freely through the vastness of the funereal silence of the event that takes place in his paintings, without any intention of making a unit, linking them to each other. He does not paint the event – the battle of Vucji Do, but the tragic feeling of the event, the consequences of which left a bloody, skirmish-filled silence. The frantic men, brandishing their arms, are absent, the horses have disappeared, the glinting of swords, the breaking of spears and all that is the product of battle, is silenced. Here we should quote the precise remarks of Mladen Lompar, who at one point concludes, “Todorovic’s line draws the form out of the paper, and in its formation, so strong and definitive, includes others’ or incidental details in the background and the protagonist is of an outstanding emotional ‘confession’”.<sup>3</sup> This quoted opinion can be applied to Rajko Todorovic’s entire oeuvre, regardless of whether we are talking about drawings or oil/acrylic paintings. Everything in his work belongs to this “outstanding emotional *confession*”.<sup>4</sup>

From Todorovic’s paintings echoes a “deaf silence” which is occasionally disturbed by the moans and wailing of the injured participants and their whimpering. If there is not a little devil in God, and the chances are that Todorovic thinks so, then God is indifferent. The devil awakens energy, and God just grinds it down. We find this duality in the artistic thinking of Rajko Todorovic. For this reason his painting speaks so that everyone can hear.

Todorovic’s landscape should not be viewed as a separate and independent unit, but as a symbolic colour content defined in red and green.<sup>5</sup> When it comes to the feeling for the Mediterranean, it should be noted that Todorovic does not exclusively belong to the Montenegrin artistic identity, which is reflected in the palette and definition of the forms, but belongs also to all currents that are dependent on strong colouristic charge, as well as on an expressive figure/subject approach and abstract expression. More precisely: he does not belong exclusively to the view of the environment from which he originated, but rather he has “immersed” his work in the stimuli which came and still come to him from the other environments of the global artistic surroundings.

Todorovic’s paintings and drawings demand to be regarded through the phenomena that carry him: the figurative and colour content, the symbolic plain, the drawing and the interdependence of elements. To everyone this is a shared atmosphere regardless of whether they lean towards the lyrical or epic side. The proposed periods are frames which the works inhabit temporally and poetically, intertwining, going further in the illumination of new phenomena dictated by the artist’s inner necessity.

<sup>3</sup> Mladen Lompar, *The Value of Individual Mythology*, The catalogue of the exhibition at the National Gallery of Macedonia, Skopje, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> At this point, I do not want to repeat what has been written about the series of drawings after 2006, as this was said in a critique of Todorovic’s exhibition of drawings from April 2008, which is here copied from *Vecernje novosti*.

<sup>5</sup> In Todorovic’s words: “Evil emerges from the ground! Layers of evil have accumulated in it!”

Referring to Todorovic's links to his great forerunners, it must be noted that we are talking here about dialogues with Picasso and Lubarda, and to some extent with Sutin. Is there an inner connection between Todorovic and El Greco remaining at the level of my assumptions, which arises from a personal reading of the oeuvres of Montenegrin artists, whom I view as "organic, visceral, exciting – pictures terrible to the core". According to Todorovic's own testimony, El Greco was closer to him than Lubarda, while Goya, in his belief, was the greatest expressionist.

Todorovic does not fit into the group of artists who have built their own personal poetics on the experiences of other masters, no matter how great they were.

He remained modest in the knowledge that his life was an announcement of statements and judgments through painting and drawing. It is along this path that we should consider the work of the artist, and not searching for the current impulses in it that time imposes. Being in time, and at the same time staying outside of time. He achieved this in an enormous number of pictures that he created. He felt it in him when he managed to express exactly what it was he was carrying, and when that searching was not sufficiently experienced. In his mouth the taste of victory over the picture and defeat inflicted by the picture that was not thought through to the end, was constantly swirling around.

Todorovic carries this in his artistic being and pulls it out in his search for the organisation of a picture: so that everything should be in the right place and that nothing should stick out. Indeed, the first impression is that in his paintings nothing is in the right place and that everything is sticking out. A careful look shows that this is an organised chaos in which every detail finds its right place on its own in its quest for a unity of artistic experience.

Todorovic is an impulsive artist. He carries within himself artistic stimuli until they explode in him and are "scattered" across the canvas. Then there usually follows a calming of the inner drive, a review of the performance and rigorous "cleaning". From the very beginning "compaction" and "cleaning" have been essential parts of his approach to painting. After 2006, he brought his painting into a phase where it could be expected that everything would explode and create a new universe, dictated by the artistic internal feelings of that moment. The explosion would not destroy what had been done previously. On the contrary! But it is too early to come to this sort of conclusion. I do not know what the future holds for the painter, but I am convinced that the artist himself does not know either. Todorovic listens in, hints, searches in the hinted, but is always ready to open a new line of research and to graft his newly created work onto a branch which is only just budding.

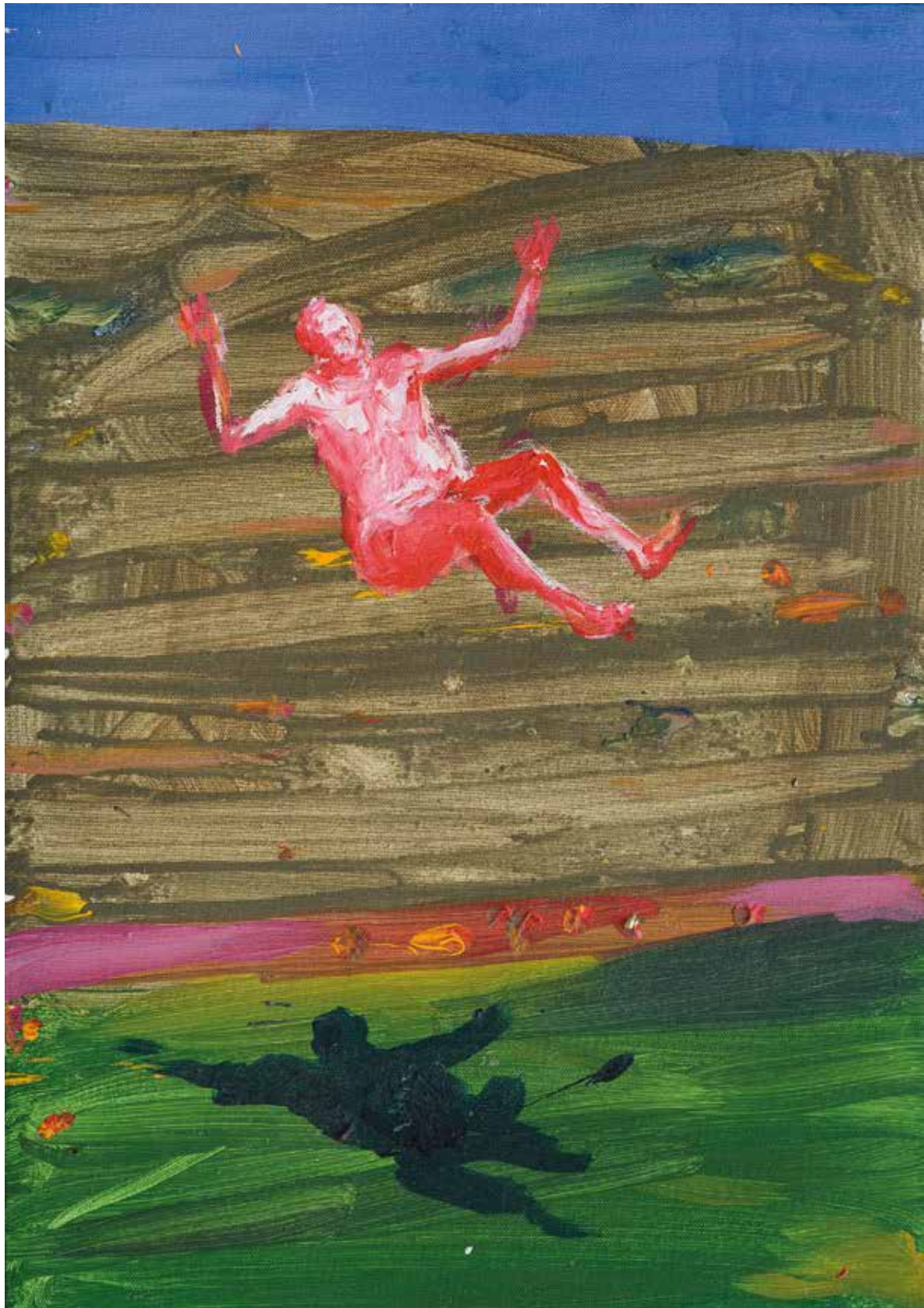
From Vasilije's book, arranged by Dragan B. Perovic, 2015.



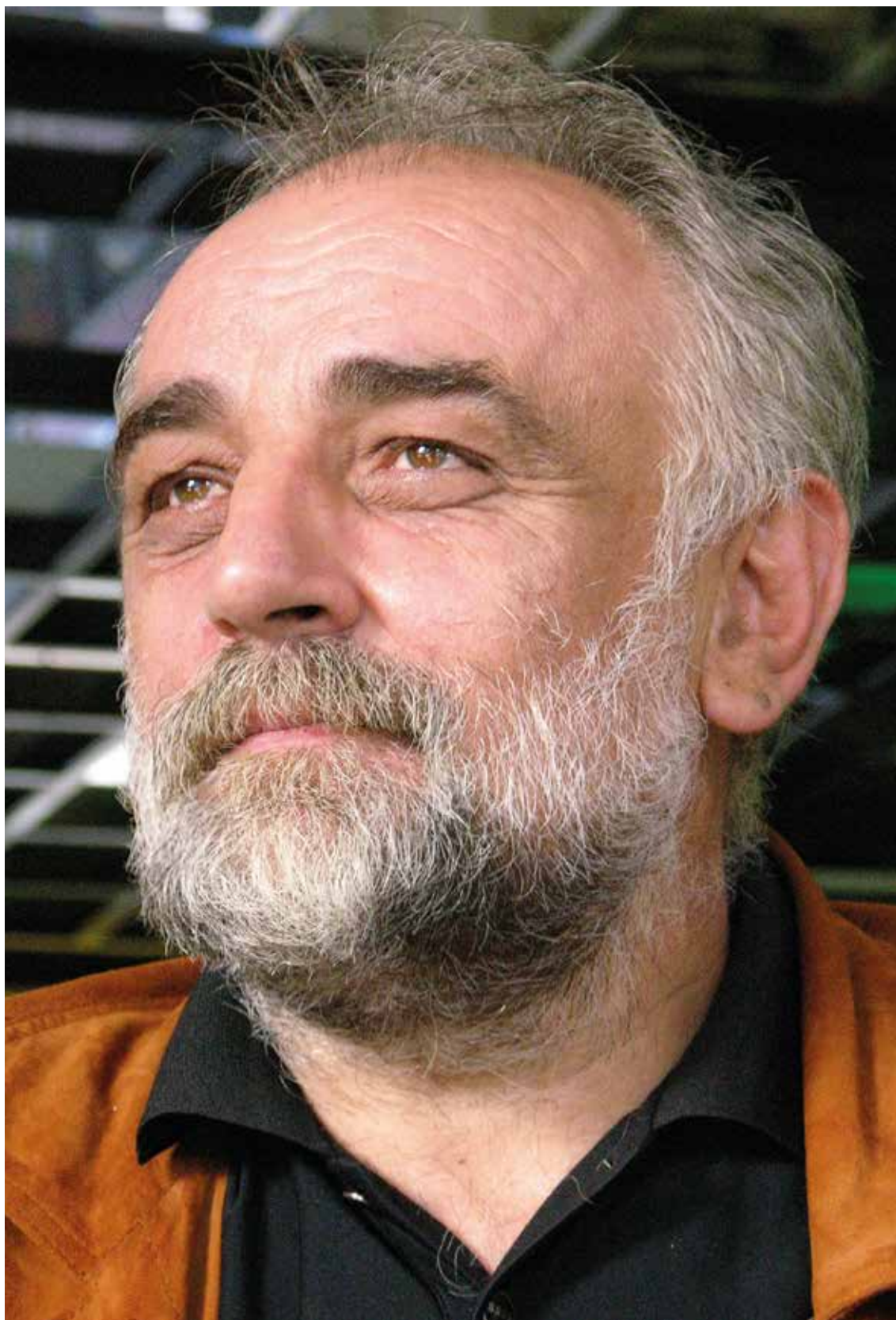
"Cage", acrylic, 40x35 cm, 2017



"Jump", oil on canvas, 60x40cm, 2009



"Jump", oil on canvas, 60x40cm, 2009



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# THOUGHTS ABOUT ART

*To create a work of art, to be an artist, to feel the soothing magic of creation is an unimaginably difficult and tiring path which requires a complete human creator.*

*Only a few reach their goal. Sometimes artists, very often contemporaries, do not realise the value and size of their achievements.*

*On that path there are two constants – faith and doubt – and they follow every serious artist from the beginning to the end.*

*Contemporaries see or experience artists as the devil, but rarely as God. An artist's entire work is somewhere in-between these two.*

*In art, one's own path and sincerity are not a wasteland.*

*The search for inspiration is the recognition of one's own emptiness and creative helplessness.*

*I strive towards a picture that disturbs and haunts, which provides resistance against that first look, against the ease of reading and interpretation. A picture that in itself has a multi-layered and ambiguous, often contradictory, logic.*

*I see true contemporary artists as the creators of cave drawings – lonely and misunderstood.*

*Many perceive art as a sack into which everything can be stuffed. When this sack bursts and spills out, some other people will say: so much rubbish!*

*There has been an acceleration in communication; however, the talent and creativity of many of my contemporaries have reduced the uptake of other people's ideas.*

*Great works of art are eternal. They can never be "outdated and superseded", as a large audience of famous idiots have been shrieking already for a century and a half. An artwork is not a machine, nor will it ever be.*



Family photo documentation



# CHRONOLOGY

- 1952 Rajko Todorovic Todor was born in Jasenov Polje, Niksic, Montenegro on 21 February to father Mirko and mother Tomana (née Pekovic), the first of four children
- 1958 The family moved to Niksic
- 1963 First exhibition of sculpture of the arts group of the Pionirski dom (House of Pioneers) headed by sculptor Branko Tomanovic
- 1966 Enrolled in secondary school (gymnasium), began playing basketball for Sutjeska Basketball Club, where he played until 1972
- 1969 Finished high school and enrolled at the Pedagogical Academy to study Fine Art
- 1972 Graduated from the Pedagogical Academy
- 1973 Lived and worked in Tuzla (Bosnia and Herzegovina)
- 1974 Enrolled at the Academy of Applied Arts in Belgrade, painting department, where he was a student of Profs. Bosko Risimovic, Rajko Nikolic and Dj. Stojanovic-Sipa
- 1976/67 Completed compulsory military service
- 1977 Transferred to the Academy of Fine Arts where he was a student of Profs. Milos Bajic and Radenko Misevic
- 1979 Founded the informal arts group Generation 9 with a group of colleagues
- 1980 Graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Belgrade in the class of Prof. Radenko Misevic Enrolled in postgraduate studies  
Exhibited in Belgrade with Generation 9
- 1981 Exhibited and received award at the September Art Salon in Niksic  
About a thousand of his works were destroyed in a flood in his apartment in New Belgrade
- 1982 Returned to Montenegro  
Held his first solo exhibition at the Gallery of the Titograd Youth Centre  
Awarded first prize at the September Art Salon  
Exhibited at INTERBIFEP in Tuzla  
Completed a series of paintings called "Prizori" (Scenes), and started working on the cycles of paintings "Relacije" (Relations) and "Strvine i Beasts" (Carrion and Beasts), on which he worked until 1986
- 1983 Moved to Titograd Started working as a set designer in TV Titograd  
Married Olivera  
Exhibited and received an award at the Contemporary Montenegrin Drawings exhibition
- 1984 Daughter Tijana born on 17 January  
Solo exhibition at Titograd Modern Gallery (of the "Relations" cycle)  
Solo exhibition at the Kolarac National University Gallery in Belgrade  
Awarded first prize at the Winter Salon in Herceg Novi  
Exhibition with Generation 9 in the Gallery of the Titograd Youth Centre

- Participated in the exhibition “From Expressionism to Expressionism” in Sombor
- 1985 Exhibited and received an award at the Contemporary Montenegrin Drawings exhibition  
Participated in exhibitions of contemporary Montenegrin art in Kraljevo (Serbia) and Kosice (Slovakia)
- 1986 Participated in D. Radovanovic’s exhibition “Some tendencies in Montenegrin fine arts during the ‘80s” in the New Temple Gallery in Sarajevo  
Exhibited at the 8th SULUJ exhibition in Tuzla  
Exhibited with Generation 9 in Germany (Stuttgart, Hamburg, Gütersloh and Meinheim)
- 1987 Began work on the “Vucji do” cycle  
Exhibited in Vienna with Generation 9  
Received the “Petar Lubarda” award at the Montenegrin Association of Fine Arts traditional exhibition
- 1988 Solo exhibition at Titograd Modern Gallery (“Vucji do” cycle)  
Exhibition in Niksic at the “Forum” Gallery (“Vucji do” cycle)
- 1989 Son Stefan born on November 21
- 1990 Exhibition in Paris at the KICA Gallery, at the N.R. Gallery in Toronto and in Belgrade at the “Cvijeta Zuzoric” Pavilion at the last Yugoslavian “6x5” exhibition
- 1991 Worked on the “Krnovo” and “Terra terribilita” painting cycles  
Received the grand prix at the Winter Salon in Herceg Novi  
The death of his younger brother Zivko (born 1953) who, although younger, financially supported his education
- 1992/93 Actively participated in the anti-war movement in Montenegro. Boycotted most exhibitions due to the disastrous war in the former Yugoslavia. Because of such attitudes the ruling regime sacked him and his wife from their jobs.
- 1993 Organised an exhibition dedicated to his brother Zivko at the Centar Gallery in Podgorica
- 1994 The Budo Tomovic Youth Centre Gallery organised a retrospective of his works
- 1995 Elected president of the Montenegrin Association of Artists
- 1996 Participated in D. Radovanovic’s exhibition “Contemporary Montenegrin Art” in Italy (Rome and Bari)  
Participated in the exhibition “Kazivanje crteza” (What Drawings Say), curated by D. Radovanovic
- 1997 Participated in the Mediterranean project “Porto Mediterraneo” in Bari  
Elected as Professor of Painting at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Cetinje  
Exhibited in Washington, in the exhibition “Contemporary Montenegrin Painting”
- 1998 Worked on the “Relations II” (Relations II) painting cycle  
Won first prize at an exhibition at the Art Salon in Podgorica
- 1999 Elected member of the Duklja Academy of Sciences and Arts  
For Radio Free Europe, on the occasion of the bombing, he wrote a diary that has been translated into several languages and was published in many magazines around the world
- 2000 Solo exhibition at the Art Pavilion in Podgorica (“Relations II” cycle)  
Exhibited in Vienna and Graz at the “Contemporary Montenegrin Painting” exhibition (curated by O. Perovic)  
Exhibition in Cologne “Contemporary Montenegrin art” (curated by M. Lompar)
- 2001 Exhibition in Hamilton, Canada in the St. James Gallery, “Mediterran” (Mediterranean) cycle of paintings (with D. Karadzic)  
Exhibited in Paris at the Salon d’autonomie Solo exhibition at the Praxis Gallery in Toronto

- 2002 Solo exhibition in Ljubljana – Gallery of the Institute for the Protection of the Cultural Heritage of Slovenia  
Exhibited at an exhibition of Montenegrin art 1946–2000 in Sarajevo  
Exhibited at the exhibition “Modern European Art” in Heidelberg  
Exhibited at “Artcité” in Fontenay-sous-Bois, Paris  
His father Mirko died (born 1917)
- 2003 Participated in the prestigious “Corps à corps” exhibition in Paris  
Took part in the exhibition “Ateliers Ouverts Fontenay”  
Participated in the exhibition “Contemporary Montenegrin Fine Art” in Odessa  
Exhibited in Paris in the exhibition “In Praise of Small Format in Contemporary Art” in the Christiane Peugeot Cultural Centre
- 2004 Participated in the exhibition “The Present Moment in Art” in Ljubljana (curated by D. Radovanovic)  
Exhibited at the Gallery of the Institute for the Protection of the Cultural Heritage of Slovenia in Ljubljana (with D. Karadzic)  
A fire in his studio destroyed about a hundred artworks  
Exhibited at INTERBIFEP in Tuzla  
Exhibited at the Salon de Lyon et du Sud-Est in Lyon  
His mother Tomana died (born 1935)
- 2005 Podgorica – A retrospective exhibition at the Petrovic Castle and the Perjanicki dom (House of the Elite Guard)  
Bijelo Polje – 35th Ratkovic Evenings of Poetry in the Gallery of the Cultural Centre  
Podgorica – Generation 9 exhibition at the Modern Gallery
- 2006 Skopje – National Gallery of Macedonia, “Mala Stanica” Multimedia Centre  
Tuzla – INTERBIFEP  
Received award from the Montenegrin Association of Fine Arts for best solo exhibition in 2005
- 2007 Ohrid – Balkan Spirit
- 2008 Podgorica – Drawings, Centar Gallery, April
- 2009 Podgorica – “Letters to Francisco”, graphical map Received the “13 July” award for 2009
- 2010 New York – “Inter Imago New York” at the Gallery MC in Manhattan “New Image – Classical Painting Techniques”  
Received the award of “Prominent Cultural Creator of Montenegro”
- 2011 Drawings for the bibliophile edition of “Au revoir, Montenegro” by Ratko Vujosevic, published by Matica Crnogorska. Also curated an exhibition of drawings.
- 2012 Worked on the “B52” painting cycle Curated an exhibition at the Art Pavilion in Podgorica
- 2013 Exhibition in his hometown, Niksic, in Gallery “A”
- 2014 Exhibition in the Zvonimir Gallery in Zagreb (with I. Rakcevic), Rijeka, Pula and Split
- 2015 Exhibition in the House of Risto Ratkovic in Bijelo Polje (with I. Rakcevic)  
Exhibition at the Malesija Cultural Information Centre, Tuzi
- 2016 Exhibition at the Modern Gallery, Podgorica  
Monograph dedicated to Rajko Todorovic Todor was published  
He received “The Liberation of the City of Podgorica Award”

# BIO-BIBLIOGRAPHY

He was born on 21 February 1952 in Jasenov Polje near Niksic. He graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Belgrade in 1980, in the class of Prof. Radenko Misevic. He undertook postgraduate studies in 1980–82 in the class of Prof. Aleksandar Lukovic. He was one of the founders of the informal group “Generation 9”. He has been a member of the Montenegrin Association of Fine Arts since 1982. From 1983–1990 he worked as a set designer for Montenegrin Radio and Television Company. From 1995–2002 he was president of the Montenegrin Association of Fine Arts. He was elected professor of painting at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Cetinje in 1997. He is a member of the PEN Centre of Montenegro. In 1999 he was elected as a member of the Duklja Academy of Sciences and Arts. He has received numerous awards for painting and the most important national award – the “13 July” award. Received the award of “Prominent Cultural Creator of Montenegro”.

He has had 30 solo exhibitions and 200 group exhibitions at home and abroad. He made several public projects, of which the most famous is “Porta Montenegro” at the Dela Vittorio stadium in Bari, made for the Mediterranean Games in 1997.

Cycles of paintings: “Relacije” (Relations), “Prizori” (Scenes), “Strvine i Beasts” (Carrion and Beasts), “Vucji do”, “Krnovo”, “Tera terabilita”, “Mediteran” (Mediterranean), “Relations II”, (Relations II), “Sole Mio”, “Memory”, “Melanholija” (Melancholy), “Pogled” (View), “Adam i Eva” (Adam and Eve), “B52, “Ljudi, ljudi i gubilista” (People, People and Calvaries)... and he is currently working on new ones.

## SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 1982 *Titograd* – Youth Centre
- 1984 *Titograd* – Modern Gallery
- 1984 *Belgrade* – Kolarac National University
- 1988 *Titograd* – Modern Gallery
- 1988 *Herceg Novi* – Josip Bepo Benkovic Gallery
- 1988 *Niksic* – Forum Gallery
- 1990 *Toronto* – NR Gallery
- 1990 *Paris* – KICA Gallery
- 1993 *Podgorica* – Centar Gallery
- 1993 *Bar* – Velisa Lekovic Gallery
- 1994 *Kotor* – Linea Verde Gallery
- 1994 *Podgorica* – Youth Centre Gallery
- 1995 *Herceg Novi* – Spinnaker Gallery
- 2000 *Podgorica* – Art Pavilion of the Montenegrin Association of Artists
- 2001 *Hamilton* – St. James Gallery “Mediterranean” Mediterranean Montenegro (with Dragan Karadzic)
- 2001 *Toronto* – Praxis Art Gallery
- 2002 *Ljubljana* – Gallery of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia
- 2004 *Ljubljana* – Gallery of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia (with Dragan Karadzic)
- 2005 *Podgorica* – Centre of Contemporary Art of Montenegro At the Petrovic Castle and at the Perjanicki dom (House of the Elite Guard) (retrospective exhibition)
- 2005 *Bijelo Polje* – Gallery of the Cultural Centre
- 2006 *Skopje* – “Mala stanica”, National Gallery of Macedonia
- 2008 *Podgorica* – Drawings, Centar Gallery, April

2009 *Podgorica* – “Letters to Francisco”, graphical map  
 2010 *Kolasin, Bijelo Polje, Berane, Rozaje, Plav, Pljevlja* –  
 “Letters to Francisco”, graphical map  
 2010 *New York* – “Inter imago”, MC Gallery in Manhattan  
 2011 *Podgorica* – “Au revoir Montenegro” – an exhibi-  
 tion of drawings published by Matica Crnogorska  
 2013 *Podgorica* – B52 exhibition in Montenegrin Asso-  
 ciation of Fine Arts  
 2013 *Niksic* – Gallery “A”  
 2014 *Zagreb* – Zvonimir Gallery  
 2014 *Rijeka* – City Gallery  
 2014 *Pula* – City Gallery  
 2015 *Split* – City Gallery  
 2015 *Bijelo Polje* – House of Risto Ratkovic  
 2015 *Tuzi* – “Malesija” Cultural Information Centre  
 2016 *Podgorica* – Modern Gallery  
 2017 *San Francisco* – Galery in FSBS Cultural Center

#### COLLECTIVE EXHIBITIONS

He has exhibited in more than 250 collective exhi-  
 bitions in Montenegro, Yugoslavia and abroad: Par-  
 is, Vienna, Stuttgart, Meinheim, Kosice, Dubrovnik,  
 Gütersloh, Toronto, Bari, Rome, Washington, Vienna,  
 Cologne, Graz, Paris, Heidelberg, Sarajevo, Belgrade,  
 Paris, New York...

#### AWARDS

1981 *Niksic* – September Art Salon Youth Award, “Mon-  
 tenegro Eksport” Award  
 1982 *Niksic* – September Art Salon Youth Award for  
 Painting

1983 *Titograd* – Contemporary Montenegrin Drawing  
 Prize  
 1985 *Herceg Novi* – Herceg Novi Winter Salon Award  
 for Painting  
 1985 *Titograd* – 3rd place at the exhibition “Contempo-  
 rary Montenegrin Drawings”  
*Titograd* – “Montex” Award at the 80<sup>th</sup> tradition-  
 al exhibition of the Montenegrin Association of  
 Fine Arts  
 1987 *Cetinje* – Cetinje Award at the 21st Salon of Yugo-  
 slav Art  
*Titograd* – “Petar Lubarda” Award, Montenegrin  
 Association of Fine Arts  
 1991 *Herceg Novi* – Herceg Novi Winter Salon Grand  
 Prix  
 1998 *Podgorica* – Podgorica Art Salon Award.  
 2006 Montenegrin Association of Fine Arts Award for  
 the best solo exhibition in 2005  
 2009 The “13 July” Award  
 2010 Prominent Cultural Creator of Montenegro  
 2013 “Milunovic, Stijovic & Lubarda” Award, Montene-  
 grin Association of Fine Arts  
 2016 “The Liberation of the City of Podgorica Award”

The artwork of Rajko Todorovic Todor has featured in  
 several cultural TV programmes: TV Montenegro, TV  
 Beograd, TV Sarajevo, Ljubljana TV, Tele Norba, An-  
 tena SUD, Rai Uno and A-Channel Toronto. He has  
 participated in several cultural radio and television pro-  
 grammes.



Drawing, ink, 35x25cm, 2011

Catalogue Record of this book is available from  
the National Library "Djurdje Crnojevic" in Cetinje, Montenegro

ISBN 978-86-309-0438-7 (Nova Pobjeda)

ISBN 978-9940-9748-1-7 (Cehra)

COBISS.CG-ID 32527888

ISBN 978-86-309-0438-7



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