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Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia  
MUSEO CORRER

**ROGER DE MONTEBELLO**

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**Portraits of Venice and Other Portraits**

*curated by* Jean Clair  
*scientific direction* Gabriella Belli

Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia

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13 May - 10 September 2017  
MUSEO CORRER

Roger de Montebello  
Portraits of Venice and Other Portraits  
Venice, Museo Correr  
13 May - 10 September 2017



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## THE MELANCHOLY WATCHMAN

Jean Clair

Baudelaire said the form of Paris changed more quickly, alas! than a mortal's heart. But naught, said he also in his melancholy, changed, when he devotedly remembered palaces, scaffolding, blocks of stone, old quarters...

Of Venice, the form scarcely changes. Yet she, too, stirs so deep a melancholy that she was chosen, so is said, not as a place for dying but at least for withdrawing from a world that changed too quickly. And so, at the close of the 19th century she harboured several of the finest minds of our culture: poets, musicians, philosophers, and painters, German, French, English, American...

Water, everywhere present, is what affords her this twofold virtue, narcotic and funereal: not changing, preserving, and nurturing by her very permanence a melancholy even greater than that which allowed Baudelaire to recall the form of a frivolous and changing Paris. Water rising with the *acqua alta* and submerging her foundations, water falling from the sky in the form of mist and gently engulfing her terraces and bell towers, below and above, water erases Venice, as surely as stump on a drawing. And yet the water goes down again, the mist is dispelled, and Venice is reborn, more mineral and more delineated than before.

This is the Venice that Roger de Montebello chose to fix: what remains of her mirages, a narrow strip of stone, hardened, mineral, between two strata of irresolution, rigorously, strictly geometrical, stunningly symmetrical like a Palladian architecture. Can painting – labile, approximate, flowing, and spontaneous – yield to such an exercise?

But even more in some of his landscapes: the dream carved in stone that before him Baudelaire – again the poet – imagined to evoke beauty, appears here, unveiled in these paintings, as it truly is: marble, calcite, crystallised mineral which, through some muted attribute, tends to develop indeed like a crystal, with sharp edges, facets, reflections: Montebello does not conjure up what at first might appear formal fancies. Instead he foreshadows a principle that makes the hardest stone in Venice not only loom over the waters but also grow like a crystal, and incline towards this other industry of which Venice is the master, glass.

Even more than Baudelaire perhaps, Rilke, in *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* I believe, intuited the nature of this dream of stone: “The soft, opiate Venice of their preconceptions and requirements disappears with these somnolent foreigners, [...] the other Venice is there, the real Venice, wide awake, brittle enough to shatter, not in any way the stuff of dreams.” Montebello's split images, when he paints these vitreous architectures, evoke these mirages.

Something else however makes the city the sojourn of a few solitaries, today as yesterday, those who do not come to seek entertainment, nor leisure, nor erring tastes, but instead, far from the crowd and bright lights, seclusion and meditation. Two worlds converge

and contrast, more than elsewhere. And this polarity is perhaps above all that of its singular topography, its geography, its planimetry, opposing two perhaps irreconcilable aspects, and two populations that hardly ever meet.

Venice is the city where the bewildered visitor's eyes discover a tangle of *calli, rii, campi, fondamenta, rive*, stretched out along the narrow canals and the houses' walls, and *salizade*, a whole strange and precise toponymy endlessly carving out a space. Labyrinth city, no Minotaur looms by a porch or a *portico*, but an everlastingly renewed solitude, or the ever more oppressive crowd. But also a panoramic Venice, a panoptic city embracing the horizon from the top of these bell towers that pierce her fabric, at the top of which we climb to discover, astounded, the immensity of the lagoon. Astray, the solitary passer-by's eye contradicts the watchman's all-seeing, glorious eye. What can the painter, alone in his studio, do to fix this dual vision, its two incompatible gazes? Of this Venice, the *altana* is the main room, dominating the chaos of the streets and the dark gullies of the alleys...

*The Altana*: Henri de Régnier in his novel was the one who made the word almost familiar to the French who were ignorant of it. He avoids the crowd, stays aloof, in the depths of a deserted decaying palace, loathe to sit under the Chinese at the *Florian*, or later mix with the raucous groups in *Harry's Bar*. And secretive, as in the heart of the city, unknown, is the painter Montebello, in the depths of his antique *palazzo*.

At first sight a protective labyrinth, where no one ventures without being initiated in the meanders, encumbrances, and blind alleys of a soul imaged by the city, in which the “I” is reflected better than anywhere else. A vision from up high, with a glorious eye dominating the world's confusion and apprehending its beauties. These two “visions” must be reconciled.

“This curious air of cousinship, sociability, and family life that in part is Venice's expression [...] with its narrow winding streets where people gather at the slightest occasion, where voices resonate like in the halls of a house, where passers-by progress cautiously as if to avoid the corner of a piece of furniture, and where shoes never wear out, the city feels like an immense collective flat, where Piazza San Marco is the most ornate room, while the other constructions, palaces and churches, take the part of large ottomans in repose, parlour game tables, decorative motifs.”

These two aspects, a priori irreconcilable, that Venice offers the permanent or temporary resident, cannot be better expressed. Régnier perfectly understood this protective role of the lagoon city: “Here, in the sort of selfish well-being in which we live, it seems we would better endure oblivion, ingratitude, injustice, we are as in a labyrinth where sorrows do not reach us so easily.”

It is not a coincidence that it was this Venice that Hugo von Hofmannsthal chose for his unfinished tale *Andreas*, and Milosz to shelter his *Amorous Initiation*. It is as though the Austrian and the Lithuanian, exiled from their own country, found in Venice they could practice their language, their writing, as though hidden in the depths of the labyrinth of the interwoven words, sentences, silences, as through the *calli* and over the bridges, to regain the lull of the nearby *campo*, their new and authentic homeland.

And (after this over long but doubtless indispensable preamble) so it is with one whose paintings I am looking at today, Roger de Montebello, he as well hidden in the depths of an old palace no one suspecting his presence, as ignored by the world as Miss Bordereau brooding over Jeffrey Aspern's literary legacy, like a mysterious rite that the two spinsters celebrated in the depths of their dim rooms.

Literature is helpless to cast a bridge over the abyss separating us from the past, and there are no Aspern papers. What can Painting do? Can it, so lacking, so weak, so remote, confront the countless monsters of the present? A considerable passer-by, Montebello, did not even once raise the question.

I wondered why his work had thus so concentrated on three themes a priori so opposed, but three only. Views of Venice, panoramas or else doors, then faces, small faces, anonymous, caught by dozens, thousands. And last, corridas.

Why these subjects, in Venice, and what brought them together? Here, extensive vistas, kept at a distance, stonily immobile. There, the unceasing encounter, brushing past, of faces, the obsession of faces. In this relentless flow of strollers, how to distinguish a face, save a face, in a few minutes, instantly, in the brief passage of this living flash, grasp it with the brush, a flash that will no longer grow dim?

Montebello paints small formats, all identical, small enough to be embraced in a glance, in keeping with the laws of a human physiology that has ever ruled. He deforms nothing, he seizes faces as in a crowd we stop an instant on a face that takes hold of us. "A lightning flash... then night." Why?

While the huge ships were beginning to force the Giudecca Canal, we saw rising in several places in the Serenissima some other gigantic forms that called themselves sculptures: at the Punta della Dogana, in front of two or three palaces, or inside, in their atrium, monstrous statues of shapeless goddesses or wounded heroes. They somehow call to mind those gigantic statues of emperors that appeared at the end of the Roman Republic, and whose fragments now lie in the courtyards of archaeological collections, the Museo Correr or the Capitoline, colossal heads, giants' sectioned hands and feet out of Science Fiction. The rise of immoderation and deformation in art has always been a forewarning of the collapse of a culture.

Venice, once again, holds a mirror up to us, in the smug flaunting of those so-called avant-garde artists, bloated with pride, whose names are familiar to everyone just like famous brands, as in the freedom given to nightmare machines, three times taller than San Marco, to penetrate it, the image of our being struck by lightning and the premonition of our disappearance.

However, under these puffy, colossal masks, the vulnerable and indefinitely repeated presence of faces endures.

Facebook. We are told that today a billion and a half human beings subscribe to Facebook. With a French accent it sounds like "fes-

se-bouc" (buttock-goat), the word sounds even worse than Aristotle's "goat-stag" that in his language designated an imaginary animal. But just let us imagine what a Book of Faces would be, like the one in which Montebello strives to paint a few pages, week after week and since the year 2000... This is the only one that would deserve to be created in Venice, that was the city of faces that eluded the crowds, were saved from the crowds, destined to cherishing and admiration.

More precious than ever are these individuals, isolated, unknown, who, far from these crowds and these follies, shelter themselves in the shell of their studio, in the depths of their huge obscure and unfurnished palaces to pursue therein a modest and admirable task. A secret life, but not solitary. Descartes led it in Amsterdam, also a city on the water, like Venice, finding protection and reflection there: "Amidst the crowd of a great, strong, and active people, more heedful of their affairs than curious of those of others, without lacking any of the conveniences found in more populated cities, I was able to live as solitary and retired as in the most remote deserts."

So why, then, also paint bullfights, why this sudden exoticism, this touch of folklore? Why these flames of colours and blazes of capes and *muletas*, in the greyness of the city, why this brutal motion of arms or the beast's hooves in the languishing calm of the *calli*, that the painter sketches with the same mastery that he displays in seizing the flash of a face in the short pose time conceded to him?

Death in the eyes: this is the meaning of the myth concealed in the corridas, like the meeting face to face of the unknown at the street corner, attraction and fascination, the entirely different become the closest, and then, nothing.

We should not forget that Venice for a long time was the city in Italy where every year at Candlemas, but also on special occasions to celebrate its distinguished guests, bullfights were held on Piazza San Marco. They were less cruel than the ones performed at Seville or Ronda: it was enough to retain or lead, with a rope attached to its horns or sometimes to its parts, a bull – usually a large bullock – goaded by some dogs trained to snap at it.

The Venetian labyrinth conceals no Minotaur. But in its bosom, more muted, more alarming, more difficult to grasp and master, there may be the treasure of the work to overwhelm, the picture to dispatch – in the almost warlike or cynegetic sense of the word –, to "finish", this muffled struggle in the silence of the studio, where you know you will never be able to seize it, flourish it, no more than Henry James' hero will ever get hold of Aspern's papers, since these papers had already been burned, have always been burned, and maybe never even existed, a striking, tragic metaphor of the poet's or the painter's task, seizing, securing, gathering a treasure that does not exist, that never lay in wait for you like the Fabled Beast, but never awaited either, the very myth of ever-inaccessible Art?

28 April 2017

## SIMPLY A PAINTER

*Gabriella Belli*

The sun comes quietly into Roger de Montebello's studio through the large window overlooking the Grand Canal. The workshop of this solitary painter who has lived and worked in Venice for over twenty years, certainly not to enjoy its elegant social life but instead its silence, the solitude that still dwells here, the special light that makes this city one of the most unfathomable places in the artistic imaginary. Racks on the walls, two large tables at the centre, several easels, and paint are the tools of his task. His paintings are hung all around, almost all the way up to the ceiling. Here is Venice, *his* Venice. We recognise its forms, its architectures, the dome of La Salute, the bulky mass of the Punta della Dogana that stretches between the Giudecca Canal and the Grand Canal, the portal of the Terese church on Dorsoduro overlooking the narrow canal. Places so engraved in our mind as to be immediately recognised or, better said, apparently recognisable. Like every painter who undertakes the portrait of Venice (Turner, Monet, Sargent, to name but a few foreigners who left a memorable testimonial of it, but just how many painters portrayed it?), Roger de Montebello learned that to paint this city you must invent for her a new poetry, a new pose, a new romance. De Montebello is certainly not satisfied with appearances, skies, water reflections, or the morning mists that enchanted thousands of painters before him. His painting is neither discursive nor descriptive, it proceeds by analytical surveys, emphasised details, negations and assertions, it is phantasmagorical, able to evoke and deceive at the same time. De Montebello is the architect of a Venice that does not exist, a Venice that is a projection or the mirror of his conscious quest for measure and beauty, dream and mystery, order and proportion. Besides, what place could lend itself better to fulfilling his need for a personal, existential seeking that – in the very image of the city, in the mystery-steeped silence that runs through it when all is still – attains a metaphysical dimension in which a secular asceticism seems to purify every thought. In his portraits of Venice, for the most part large canvases drowned in the white of the background or fog whence, ghost-like, the architectures arise, there is a faint glimmer that never dims in the dark of night or the full light of day. There are no shadows in the city imagined by De Montebello, but a “majestic and simple” architecture living in a timeless dimension, as in the magnificent pictures devoted to the portal of Le Terese, a subject that had caught his attention in the 1990s and endlessly repeated. Moreover, there is a vocation for repetition in Montebello's work that concerns all his motifs, the Venetian ones, the corridas, the portraits. The painter does not, as is often the case, exhaust his inspiration in a single work, but the achieved sense of his poetics resides in the seriality of the possible infinite sequences, as in the instance of the bullfights. This cycle of small-format works, all done from life, is a triumph of form, colour, and movement,

revealing the joy of his painting, the ease with which his brush captures the most tragically exalting flash second of this performance of life and death, and perpetuates the frenzy of the bodies battling in the arena in a dizzying immemorial dance.

And in his portraits as well, spontaneous, felicitous for the immediacy and swiftness of the touch, although each time the subject is different the ensemble triumphs, the vast fresco of this humankind of friends and acquaintances that crossed his life in different times and ways, his anguishes, his loves.

De Montebello – with the same desire to perpetuate, immortalising it in endless series, his need to belong to places, persons, events, so intense that he seems to want to reproduce them out of an obsessive fear of losing them or finding them changed – devoted to the portal of Le Terese a great many canvases, an endless number of drawings and sketches, experimenting every possible perspective framing, from foreground to infinite background where the portal almost becomes a blue dot in the dazzling light of the lagoon. Like the 19th-century masters, for each new composition De Montebello studies and explores *from life*, seeks to learn from reality, visits places, lingers to observe, steeps himself in the vibration of light and the indistinctness of colours, but unlike the portraits and corridas, his Venice paintings will be conceived in his studio, each picture in this cycle being the result of a process of *distillation* of the images impressed in his memory: a description of places that his painting renders metaphysical, remote, not real.

So such is Venice to the eye of this artist who grew to know her beauty, without time or beyond time, immutable as for centuries writers and poets have imagined her. The golden ratio of his canvases confounds and deceives. De Montebello is a solitary painter of images removed from reality and then intentionally freed from rules and canons, who shares with Venice the same vocation to don a mask, conceal himself from a direct gaze, who in many of his paintings reflects himself in a mirror and is shattered in images, sometimes broken into fragments. So, is what remains of Venice the representation of an angel-like city fallen in the death-throes of its myth? Thus before the rise of perfect forms, magically poised between sky and earth or floating in the vacuum of endless space, its mystery is shadowed forth. De Montebello is under the charm of the *genius loci*, he seeks to represent it with Apollonian measure, but the representation of its forms, painted in perspective fragmentations, distortions, and negations, reveals to us the most impenetrable aspect of the city that emerges out of its stereotyped image. In the portraits of Venice his liquid and transparent paint never yields to the temptation of colour, keeping to the elegance of a cold tone between cobalt blue and the white of the sky. Not a single concession to the decorative or the narrative, Venice can only be painted by

visual metaphors, sometimes preferring the part that best represents the whole, the particulars that suggest the ensemble, the detail that magnifies the visionary power of the superb architecture the city has preserved. Certainly his Venice paintings with their duplicating and multiplying reveal to us much more than the artist may wish to tell. His painting is both real and imaginary, offering us an idea of the city cleansed of the dross of the everyday, still capable of enchantments of beauty, almost drained by her endless obligation to one who still wants to paint her. We can but wonder if this place may still have something new to reveal to painters' eyes, still be a source

of inspiration and raptness for their gaze. We can but wonder if her iconic force may not be exhausted in the thousands of brushstrokes that portrayed her over the centuries. Roger de Montebello's canvases are the most eloquent reply: magnificent interpretations of a city whose most secret soul, whose sublimity we might say, the artist wishes to convey to us, recollecting the golden age of the presence of Venice in painting as a subject of study and at once the expression of an extraordinary imaginative power, these paintings after all are the fruit of an unceasing struggle with reality, to finally wrench a truth that still eludes our understanding.

*translation: Susan Wise*

Roger de Montebello is a Franco-American painter who was born in Paris in 1964 into a family of art lovers. After studying the fundamentals of drawing and painting at the *Facultad de Bellas Artes* in Seville (1984-1985), he continued his artistic education (painting, art history and aesthetics) at the University of Harvard, where he graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in 1988.

Montebello's first exhibition was in Paris in 1992. That same year he set up his atelier in Venice, where he continues to live and work. The year 2011 saw him participate in the Venice Art Biennale with an exhibition called *Montebello-Megachromia*. After a series of personal shows followed, mostly in Paris and London, this exhibition at the Museo Correr is his first in a museum.



*L'Auriga di Delfi / The Charioteer of Delphi / L'Aurige de Delphes, 2015*  
olio su tela / oil on canvas / huile sur toile  
140 × 190 cm

## LA PORTA / LA PORTE / THE DOORWAY

La porta delle Terese ispira la mia pittura dal 1990. Maestosa e semplice, essa lacerava un austero muro di convento, posto su una riva che si affaccia su un piccolo canale veneziano. Collegata all'acqua da alcuni gradini il cui numero varia a seconda della marea, è sormontata da un arco spezzato che evoca insieme le corna di un toro, l'apertura verso il cielo, e la semplicità geometrica di curve impostate su rette.

Porta fabbricata dall'uomo, il suo riflesso nell'acqua la fa entrare nel regno della natura, a cui si consegna liberamente in balia delle onde e dei venti. Se la porta è melodia, il suo riflesso è armonia. Il tutto è completo e insieme aperto, e rinnovato senza posa.

Come ogni altra porta, ma con ancor maggiore chiarezza, è insieme oggetto materiale e luogo di passaggio. Ma passaggio da che cosa e verso che cosa? Dalla luce verso l'oscurità, da una periferia verso un centro? Dal bianco a un blu profondo, dall'acqua all'aria? Dal mondo esterno verso un mondo interiore? Verso altre porte raddoppiate e sfalsate come in una fuga musicale, e quindi una porta aperta su se stessa, forse all'infinito? E se non ci fosse niente "dietro" la porta, e il passaggio consistesse semplicemente nella vibrazione stessa della porta, passaggio dalla materia verso l'energia o lo spirito?

La porte des Terese inspire ma peinture depuis 1990. Majestueuse et simple, elle perce un mur conventuel austère posé sur un quai, au bord d'un petit canal vénitien. Elle est reliée à l'eau par quelques marches dont le nombre varie selon la marée. Elle est surmontée d'un arc brisé évoquant à la fois les cornes d'un taureau, l'ouverture vers le ciel et la simplicité géométrique de courbes posées sur des droites.

Porte fabriquée par l'être humain, son reflet dans l'eau la fait entrer dans le domaine de la nature, où elle s'épanche librement au gré des vagues et des vents. La porte est mélodie, son reflet est harmonie. Le tout est complet mais ouvert, et sans cesse renouvelé.

Comme toute autre porte mais plus clairement encore, elle est à la fois objet matériel et lieu de passage. Un passage vers quoi ? Du clair vers le sombre ? D'une périphérie vers un centre ? Du blanc vers un bleu profond ? De l'eau vers l'air ? Du monde extérieur vers un monde intérieur ? Vers d'autres portes, dédoublées et décalées comme une fugue musicale, donc une porte ouverte sur elle-même, peut-être à l'infini ? Et s'il n'y avait rien "derrière" la porte ? Et si le passage était simplement dans la vibration même de la porte, passage de la matière vers l'énergie ou vers l'esprit ?

The Terese doorway has been an inspiration for my painting since 1990. Majestic yet unassuming, it pierces an austere convent wall located on a quayside, alongside a small Venetian canal. It is linked to the water by a matter of steps, the number of which vary depending on the tide. On the top of the doorway is a broken arch that is reminiscent of the horns of a bull, as well as an opening towards the sky and the geometrical simplicity of curves placed over straight lines.

The doorway was created by a human being, yet its reflection in the water accompanies it into the domain of nature, where it expands freely at the mercy of the waves and wind. The doorway is melody, its reflection is harmony. It is complete yet it is open, and is being constantly renewed.

All doorways are at one and the same time material objects and a place of passage. This is emphatically so in this case. Passage towards what? From light towards darkness? From the outskirts towards a centre? From white towards deep blue? From water towards air? From the outside world towards an interior world? Towards other doorways, divided and displaced like a musical fugue, so an open doorway onto itself, even towards infinity? And what if there were nothing "behind" the doorway? And what if the passage were simply in the vibration of the door, the passage of matter towards energy or the spirit?



*Terese*, 2016  
olio su tela / oil on canvas / huile sur toile  
190 × 190 cm



*Terese*, 2014  
olio su tela / oil on canvas / huile sur toile  
140 × 190 cm



*Terese*, 2014  
olio su tela / oil on canvas / huile sur toile  
140 × 160 cm



*Terese*, 2016  
olio su tela / oil on canvas / huile sur toile  
140 × 190 cm

VENEZIA / VENISE / VENICE

2014 - 2016

olio su tela / huile sur toile / oil on canvas

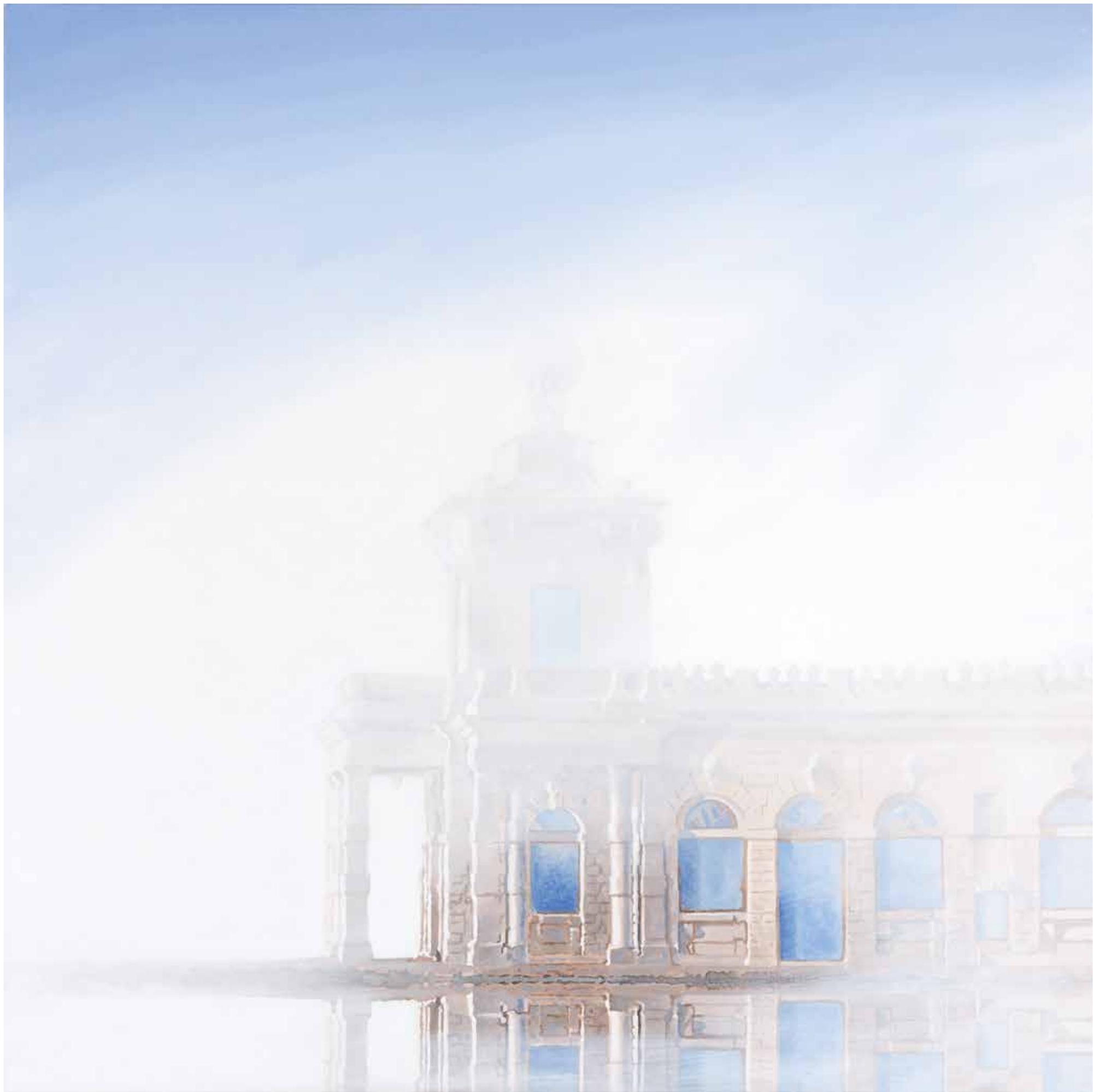
I quadri di Venezia in grande formato presenti in questa rassegna rappresentano per me il mondo della luce, della trasparenza e del mistero apollineo. Realizzati nell'atelier, sono tuttavia il frutto di numerosi confronti preliminari all'aria aperta con il reale, di cui sono come una purificazione. Alcuni temi sono ricorrenti: la porta delle Terese, la Punta della Dogana, San Michele, Venezia che emerge dalla laguna. Mi parlano del passaggio da uno stato a un altro, e dell'unità del mondo, in cui la materia si dissolve nella luce.

Les grands formats de Venise présents ici représentent pour moi le monde de la clarté, de la transparence et du mystère apollinien. Ils ont été réalisés à l'atelier, mais après de nombreuses confrontations préalables avec le réel, en plein air, dont ils sont une purification. Quelques thèmes dominant : la porte des Terese, la Punta della Dogana, San Michele, Venise émergeant de la lagune. Ils me parlent du passage d'un état à un autre et de l'unité du monde, où la matière se dissout dans la lumière.

The large formats of my Venice work on display here represent the world of light, transparency and Apollonian mystery for me. I painted them in my atelier, but only after repeated preliminary visits to the actual locations, en plein air. They are a sort of purification. There are several dominating themes: the Terese doorway, the Punta della Dogana, San Michele, Venice emerging from the lagoon. They talk to me of the passage from one state to another and the unity of the world, where matter dissolves in light.



*Punta della Dogana, 2016*  
olio su tela / oil on canvas / huile sur toile  
140 × 140 cm



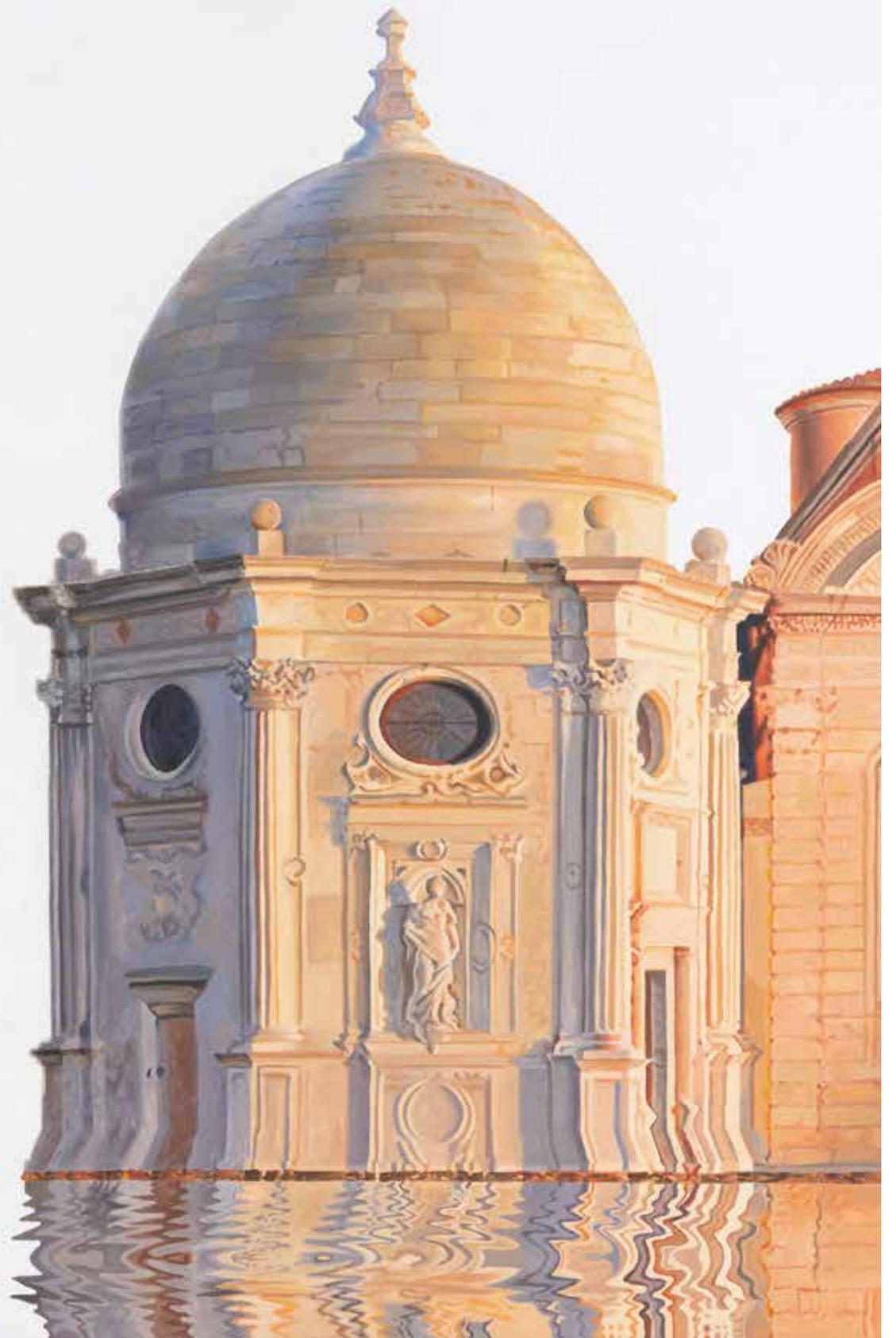
*Punta della Dogana, 2016*  
olio su tela / oil on canvas / huile sur toile  
140 × 140 cm



*Panorama*, 2016  
olio su tela / oil on canvas / huile sur toile  
170 × 305 cm



*Punta della Dogana, 2016*  
olio su tela / oil on canvas / huile sur toile  
190 × 230 cm



*San Michele*, 2016  
olio su tela / oil on canvas / huile sur toile  
140 × 140 cm

## CORRIDE / CORRIDAS / BULLFIGHTS

2000 - 2013

olio su pannello / huile sur panneau / oil on panel

Dipinti per lo più all'aria aperta e nel vivo dell'azione, durante la corrida, questi piccoli quadri formato 16 × 22 cm hanno per me la stessa natura dell'action painting. Per dipingerli ho percorso in lungo e in largo la Spagna, di cittadina in cittadina, di villaggio in villaggio di Andalusia, Estremadura, Castiglia e Aragona, e anche un po' il Portogallo e il Sud della Francia. E a ogni sosta lo stesso rituale: trovare l'arena, parcheggiare la macchina, acquistare un biglietto, scegliermi con attenzione il posto, all'ombra o al sole. Sedevo sempre sulle gradinate tra gli spettatori e sistemavo la scatola dei colori sulle ginocchia, circondato da vicini incuriositi, spesso bambini dagli occhi spalancati, felici di vedere i pennelli danzare nel colore.

Di solito dipingevo tre quadri per corrida, 45 minuti per ogni quadro. Non ritoccavo mai: "A lo hecho, pecho!" Talvolta, dopo aver viaggiato tutto il giorno, al mio arrivo pioveva: corrida annullata. Oppure le arene erano piene: "No hay billetes". Allora passavo direttamente alla tappa successiva: trovare nel villaggio una modesta camera d'albergo. Ma lì, invece di riposarmi, dipingevo magari per due ore, come se fossi nell'arena, come se niente fosse stato annullato, e come se vedessi davanti a me lo spettacolo straordinario in cui l'uomo danza con la morte.

Réalisés pour la plupart en plein air et dans le feu de l'action, c'est-à-dire pendant la corrida, ces petits tableaux de format "1 Figure" (16 × 22 cm) s'apparentent pour moi à du "action painting". Pour les peindre j'ai sillonné l'Espagne, de petite ville en petit village d'Andalousie, d'Extrémadure, de Castille et d'Aragon, aussi un peu le Portugal et le sud de la France. À chaque fois le même rituel : trouver les arènes, garer a voiture, acheter un billet, choisir attentivement ma place à l'ombre ou au soleil. Toujours je prenais place dans les gradins parmi les spectateurs, et j'installais ma boîte de peinture sur mes genoux, entouré de voisins intrigués, souvent des enfants aux grands yeux, joyeux de voir mes pinceaux danser dans la couleur.

Généralement je peignais 3 tableaux par corrida, soit 45 minutes par tableau. Je ne les retouchais jamais: « A lo hecho, pecho ! ». Mais parfois, après avoir roulé toute la journée, j'arrivais et il pleuvait: donc corrida annulée. Ou les arènes étaient pleines: « No hay billetes ». Alors, je passais directement à l'étape suivante: trouver dans le village une modeste chambre d'hotel. Mais là, au lieu de m'y reposer, j'y peignais deux heures durant, comme si j'étais dans l'arène, comme si rien n'avait été annulé et comme si je voyais devant moi ce spectacle extraordinaire où l'homme danse avec la mort.

Most of these were painted outside, in the midst of the action, namely during the corrida. The small scenes format "1 Figure" (16 × 22 cm) belong to the "action painting" category for me. This work took me the length and breadth of Spain, through the little villages of Andalusia, Extremadura, Castille and Aragon, and even into Portugal and the south of France. I went through the same routine each time: finding the arenas, parking the car, buying a ticket, then carefully choosing a seat that was in the shade or the sun. I took my place on the terraced seats among the public and set up my paintbox on my knees, surrounded by curious onlookers, often wide-eyed children who enjoyed seeing my paint brushes dancing in the colours.

As a rule I painted three scenes for each corrida, so that meant 45 minutes each painting. I didn't retouch them. "A lo hecho, pecho!". But sometimes I'd get to the place after a long day travelling, only to find it was raining and the corrida cancelled. At other times the arena would already be full: "No hay billetes". So I'd move straight on to the next phase: finding a simple hotel room in the village. But instead of resting there, I would spend two hours painting as though I were in the arena, as though nothing had been cancelled and as if I'd been watching that extraordinary performance – of man dancing with death.



*Cenicientos, 2007*  
olio su pannello / oil on panel / huile sur panneau  
16 × 22 cm



*Arles, 2010*  
olio su pannello / oil on panel / huile sur panneau  
22 × 16 cm



*Lodosa*, 2011  
olio su pannello / oil on panel / huile sur panneau  
16 × 22 cm



*San Sebastián de los Reyes, 2007*  
olio su pannelo / oil on panel / huile sur panneau  
22 × 16 cm



*Cantalejo, 2007*  
olio su pannello / oil on panel / huile sur panneau  
22 × 16 cm



*Bayonne*, 2011  
olio su pannello / oil on panel / huile sur panneau  
22 × 16 cm



*Sevilla, 2009*  
olio su pannello / oil on panel / huile sur panneau  
22 × 16 cm



*Lodosa*, 2011  
olio su pannello / oil on panel / huile sur panneau  
16 × 22 cm



*Torrejón de Ardoz, 2013*  
olio su pannelo / oil on panel / huile sur panneau  
16 × 22 cm



*Sevilla, 2010*  
olio su pannello / oil on panel / huile sur panneau  
16 × 22 cm

## RITRATTI / PORTRAITS / PORTRAITS

2004 - 2011

olio su pannello / huile sur panneau / oil on panel

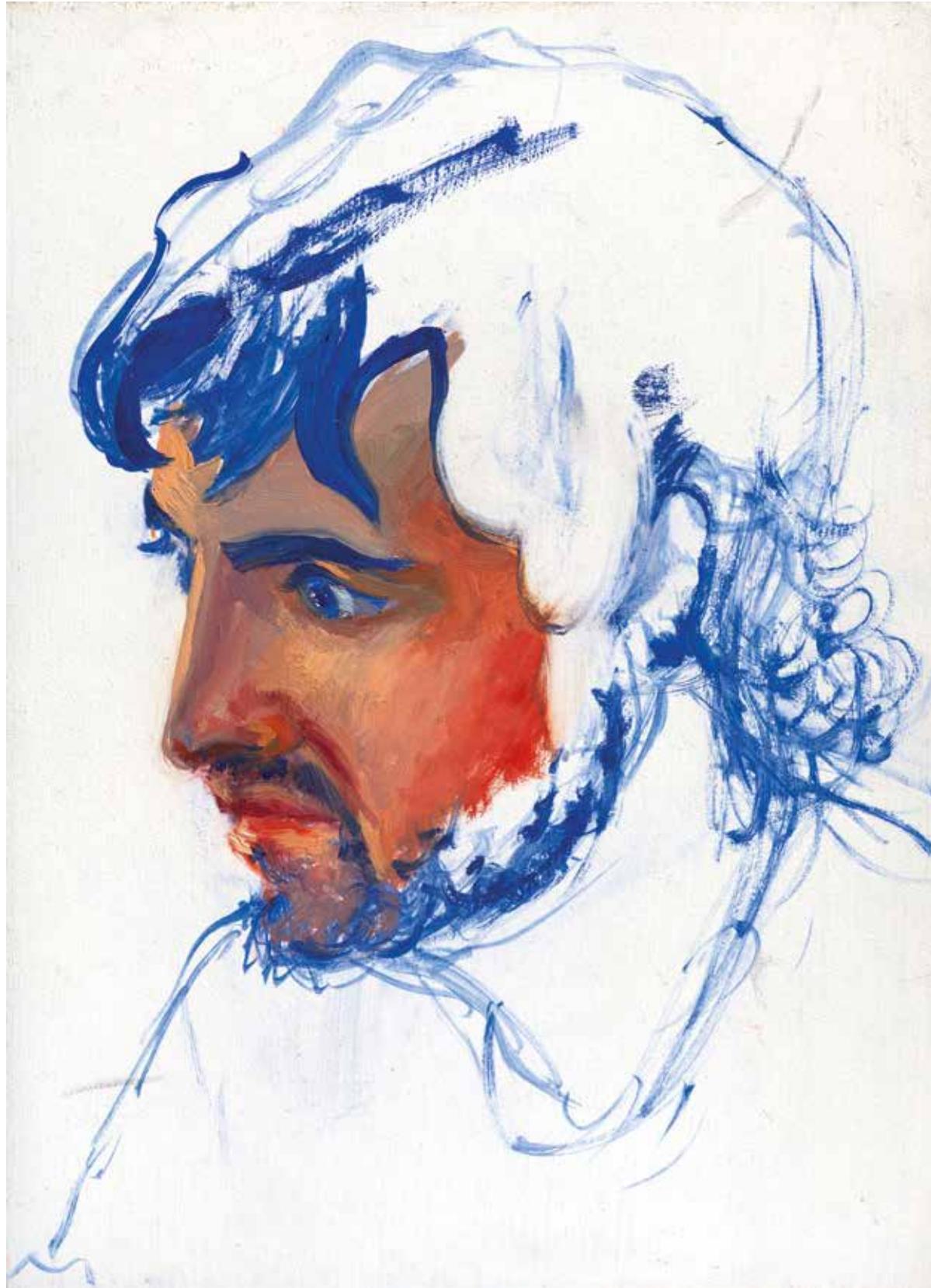
Questi ritratti, eseguiti tra il 2004 e il 2011, sono tutti di dimensione 16 × 22 cm. La loro esecuzione è stata rapida: un'ora al massimo per lo più, per alcuni un'ora e mezza. Sono stati realizzati tutti dal vivo, e i modelli che hanno posato per me, su mia richiesta, sono diversi: familiari, amici, parenti o sconosciuti. Di volta in volta ho voluto fissare, in pochi tratti e nell'intensità del momento, il carattere di un volto e coglierne la particolare forza espressiva.

Ces portraits, exécutés entre 2004 et 2011, sont tous de dimension "1 Figure", soit 16 × 22 cm. Leur exécution a été rapide : une heure maximum pour la plupart, une heure et demie pour certains. Ils ont tous été réalisés sur le vif, et les modèles qui ont posé pour moi, et à ma demande, sont variés : famille, amis, proches, ou inconnus. J'ai à chaque fois voulu, en quelques traits et dans l'intensité du moment, fixer le caractère d'un visage, et en saisir la force expressive singulière.

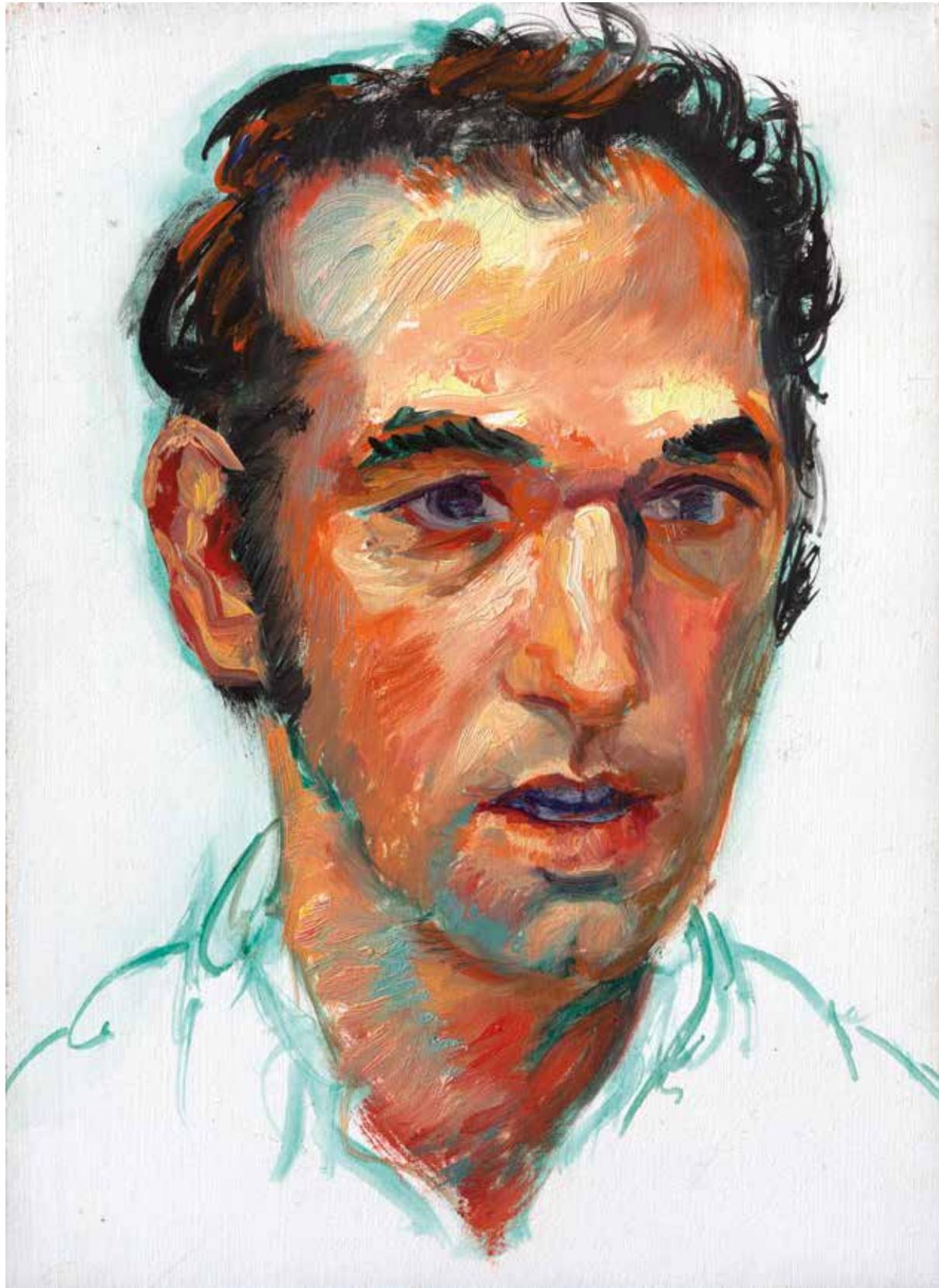
These portraits were painted between 2004 and 2011, and are all "1 Figure" dimension, namely 16 × 22 cm. They were painted very quickly: one hour at the most for the majority, an hour and a half for the others. I painted them live; I asked different people to pose for me: family members, friends, neighbours and strangers. My aim was to make the most of the intensity of the moment to capture the character of each face and the depth of individual expressions.



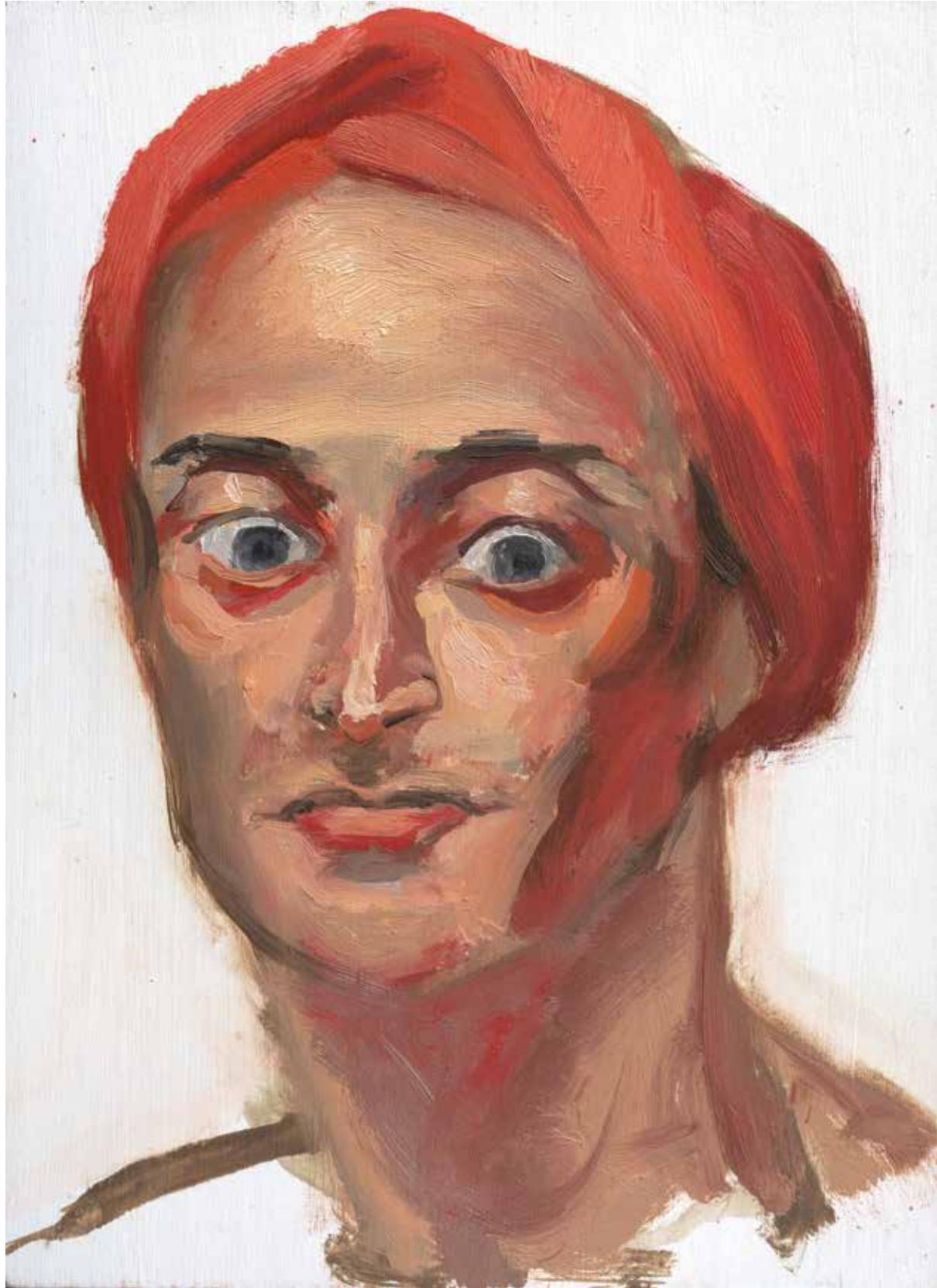
*Paula*, 2005  
olio su pannello / oil on panel / huile sur panneau  
22 × 16 cm



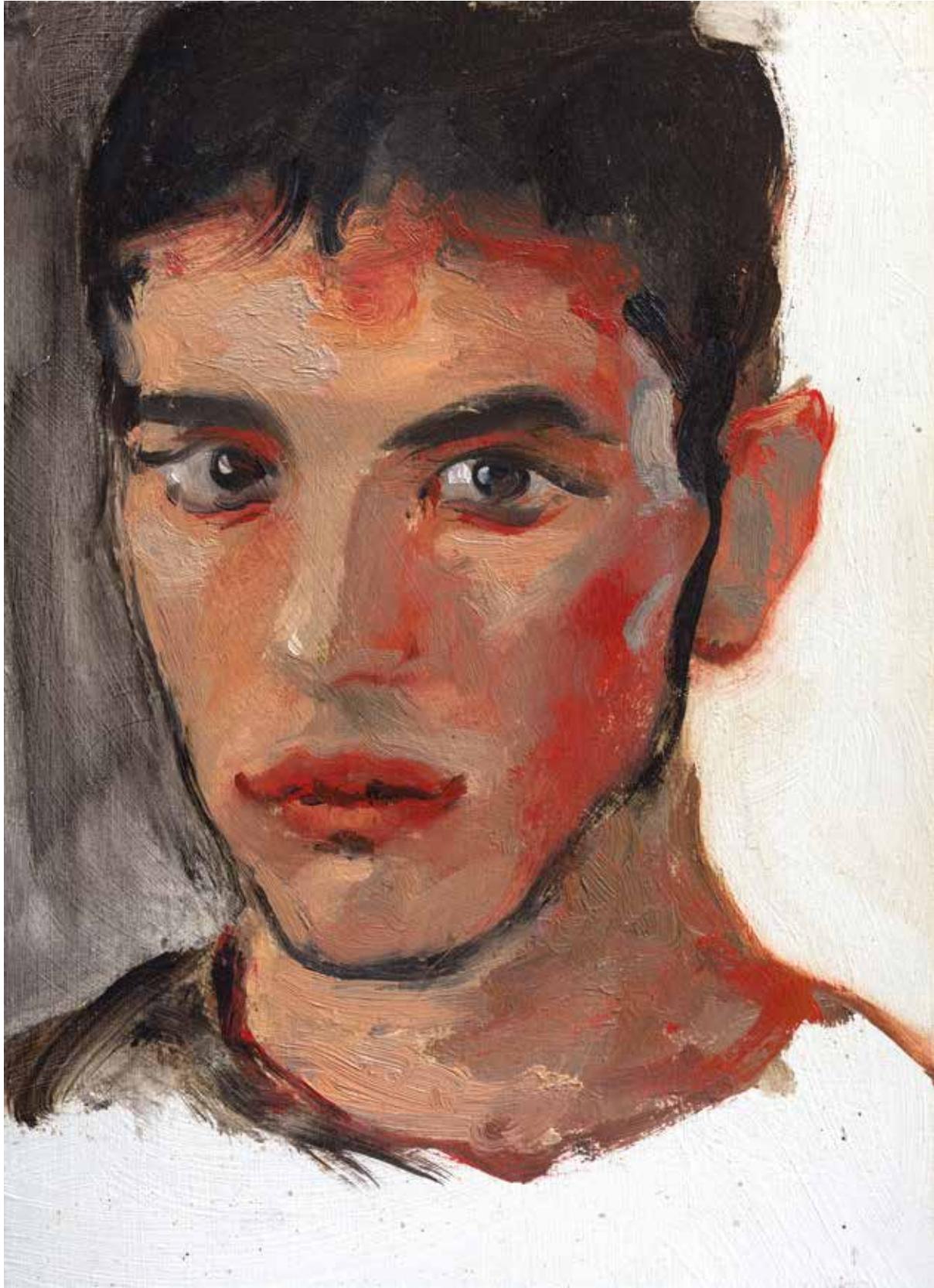
*Peter*, 2006  
olio su pannello / oil on panel / huile sur panneau  
22 × 16 cm



*Cristóbal*, 2006  
olio su pannello / oil on panel / huile sur panneau  
22 × 16 cm



*Esteban, 2005*  
olio su pannello / oil on panel / huile sur panneau  
22 × 16 cm



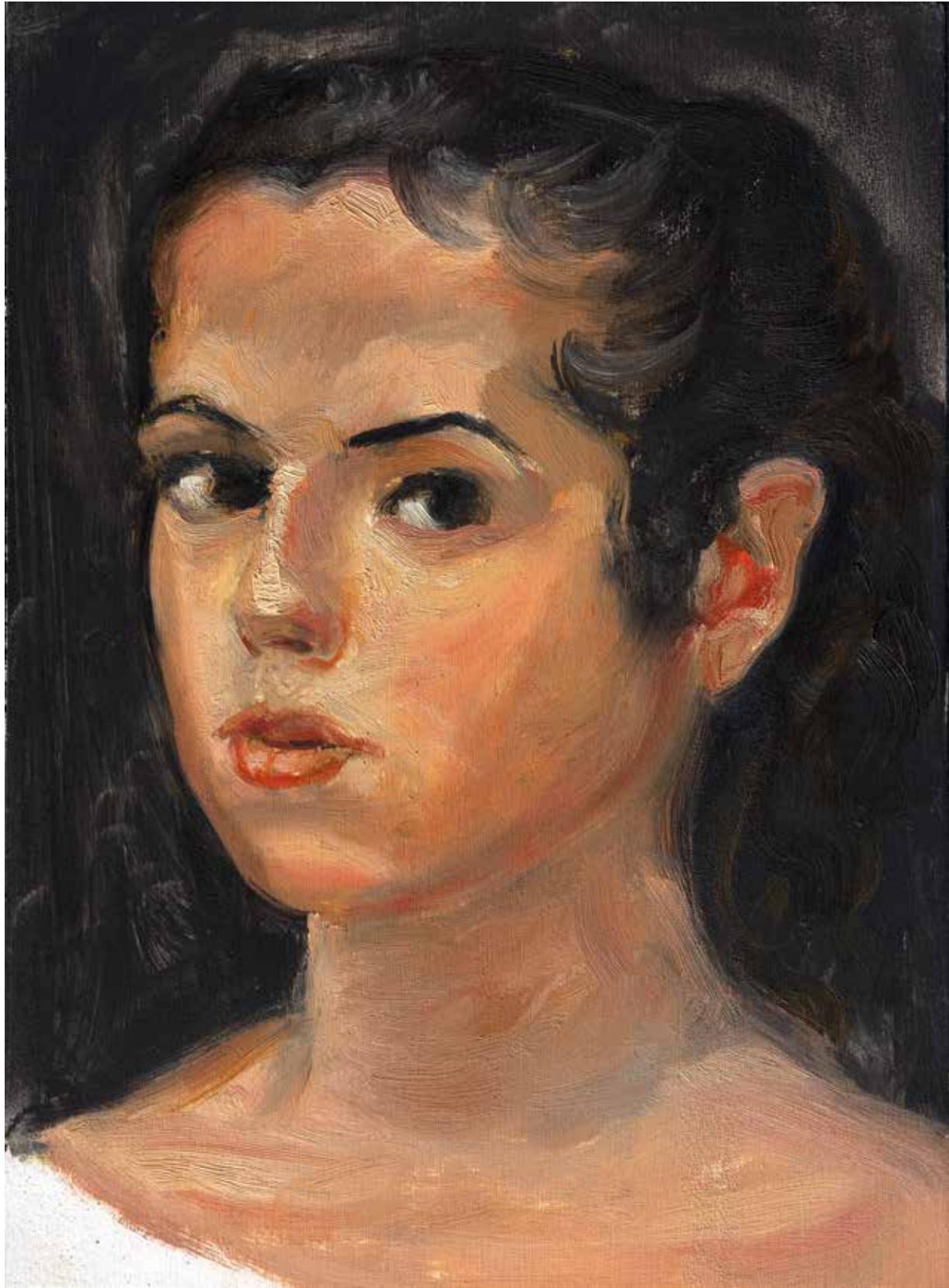
*Iván*, 2005  
olio su pannello / oil on panel / huile sur panneau  
22 × 16 cm



*Franca, 2005*  
olio su pannello / oil on panel / huile sur panneau  
22 × 16 cm



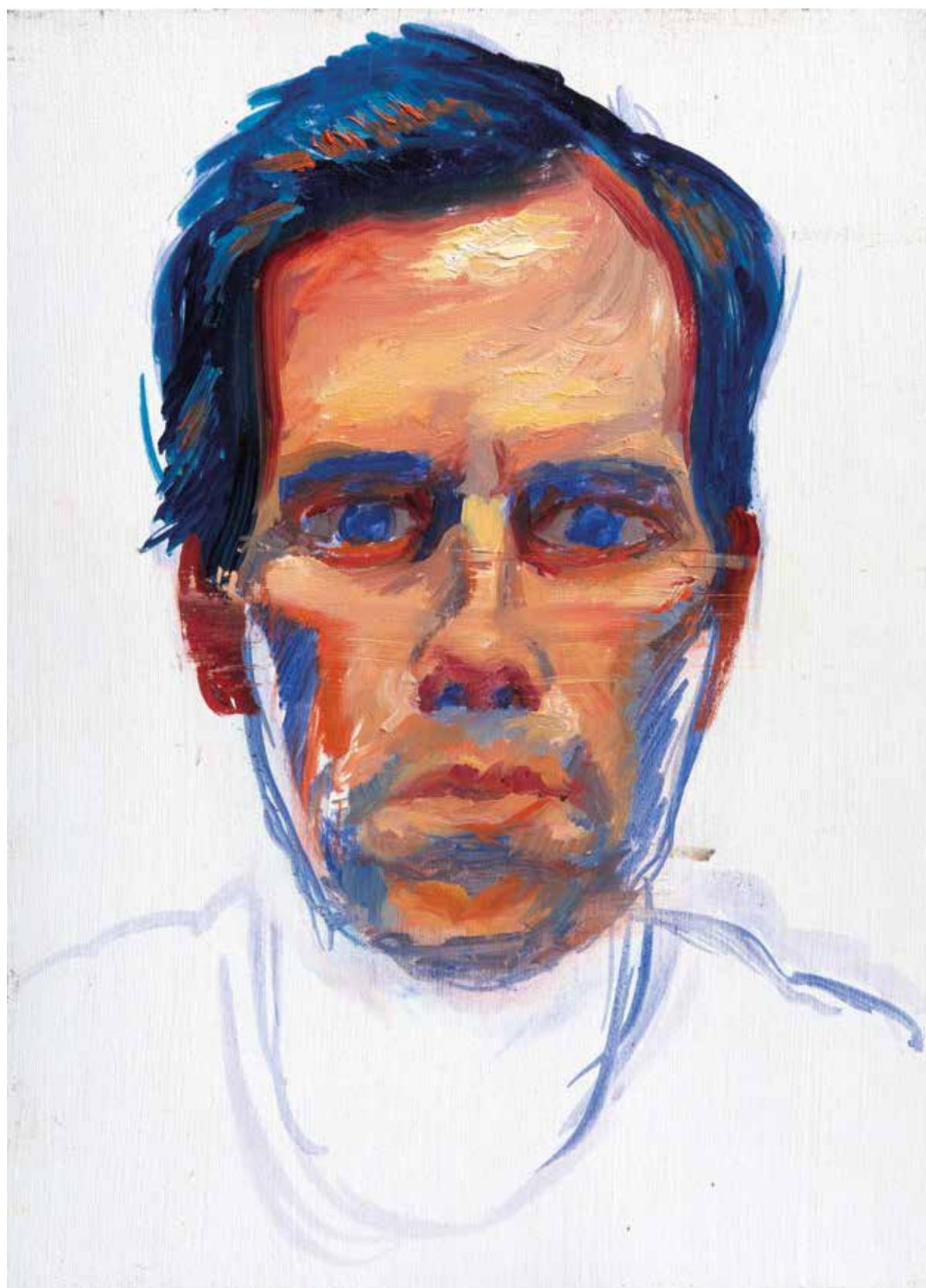
*Lorrie, 2006*  
olio su pannello / oil on panel / huile sur panneau  
22 × 16 cm



*Merced*, 2005  
olio su pannello / oil on panel / huile sur panneau  
22 × 16 cm



*Methu*, 2005  
olio su pannello / oil on panel / huile sur panneau  
22 × 16 cm



*Self*, 2006  
olio su pannello / oil on panel / huile sur panneau  
22 × 16 cm