



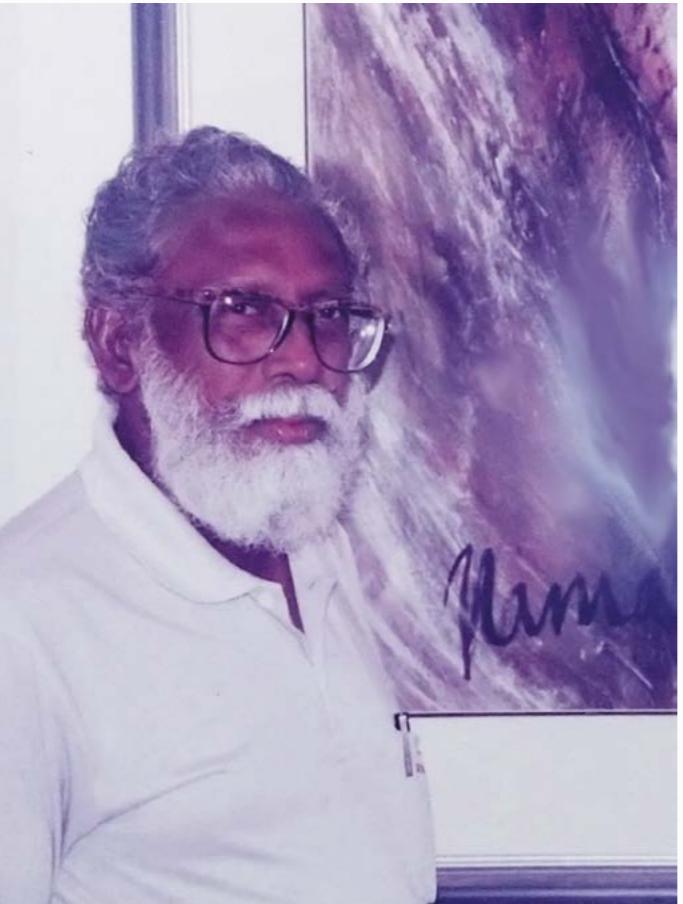
NAMASIVAYAM

POINTS OF ARTICULATION
PIONEERING FIGURE DRAWING IN SINGAPORE

Points of Articulation

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“THE MOST IMPORTANT AREAS OF ANATOMY TO BE STUDIED ARE THE POINTS OF ARTICULATION. UNLESS A PARTICULAR INTEREST IS DEVELOPED IN DRAWING AND PAINTING THE LIFE FIGURE, A DETAILED KNOWLEDGE OF ANATOMY IS NOT REALLY NECESSARY. WHAT IS IMPORTANT IS THE INTERRELATIONSHIP OF THE INDIVIDUAL PARTS OF THE FIGURE THAT GO TO MAKE UP THE WHOLE.”

Prologue

Audrey Yeo

I am honoured to have produced and hosted at the gallery the exhibition "Solamalay Namasivayam: Points of Articulation", 16 November – 22 December 2019, and this monograph that gives insight into the life of the aforementioned late artist. Namasivayam - or 'Nama' as he was better known to his friends - was an important founding father of the life-drawing movement in Singapore, and an artist-educator from the pioneer generation that straddled across the final years of British colonialism, the post-independence era and even the new millennium. While he went largely unrecognised during his lifetime as an artist *per se*, since he was busy contributing to the scene from an educational standpoint, and the fact that he faced familial and socio-cultural constraints owing to the subject matter of his artworks, we could perhaps go with the old adage that the pioneer artist who strives for something different will invariably face marginality. As an educator, he helped shape the art curriculum in Singapore through his teaching, developing syllabi and advocating for the acceptance and promotion of life-drawing. This monograph unveils the majority of what we were able to find, curate and preserve, including over 200 drawings and paintings, 30-plus sketchbooks, and 15-plus interviews via verbal and written accounts. The resultant research inadvertently revealed a snapshot of Singapore's nascent artistic landscape from the 1990s to early 2000s, including how the local life-drawing movement not only managed to survive in quiet obscurity, but actually flourished through steadfast persistence. Indeed, it was largely thanks to the passion and dedicated efforts of Namasivayam, that life-drawing has become a significant thread in the fabric of the Singapore art scene today.

I remember the first instance one of the large drawings was un-scrolled here in Gillman Barracks. I was immediately struck by the dynamic strokes of charcoal overlaid with vivid colours, rendering a portrait that projected a defiant dignity. And of course, what strong legs the subject had! It was almost as though there was an existential urgency that was desperately captured on that paper, a dynamic movement that would soon morph into another posture. The portrayal of that movement made me curious as to the artist's own bearings at that time. What was he thinking? What was his life like? Why? There was a passion in the work even though it was anatomically technical.

Namasivayam's oeuvre consists of figurative portraits and landscapes. There are oil and watercolour landscapes of an earlier and more rustic Singapore, depicting for example, Peirce Reservoir, the nature around Teachers Estate (where he lived), Little India, and other places on the island. This monograph is largely dedicated to the drawings and paintings of figures - charcoal, Chinese ink, pastel, oil

paintings on wood board, canvas and a variety of papers: hard card, art paper, tracing paper, and brown paper. The drawings were largely captured in quick sketches during life-drawing workshops at LASALLE college during the informally arranged Group 90 sessions. Sometimes, these drawings were touched up or re-worked after the sessions. The drawings interplay technical observations of the anatomy, focusing on certain points of articulation such as the joints, with liberating strokes as his artistic expression. One can almost imagine the workings of the artist from the eye (sight), to the mind (perception), then the hand (execution). Ultimately, figure after figure, it becomes apparent that there is a persistent interest in anatomy, pose and movement. And there were portraits as well. The stubborn need to connect the spirit of the subject with the accuracy of his/her anatomy to form a reality of a portrait, led me to wonder more about his own awakened sense of restlessness.

Nama, in the artistic sense, was an entrepreneur. He enthusiastically brought back to Singapore a school of teaching from Australia that he was introduced to when he was a student on the Colombo Plan Scholarship programme from 1957 to 1961. He was part of an Indian-Chinese Malay trio selected to go abroad, including names that later became well-known in the Singaporean art scene: Sim Tong Khern and Suri Bin Mohyani. While the institutions there placed great emphasis on figure drawing as a foundational study, this method was at odds with the-then prevalent mores of an Asian 'polite' society. It was a subtle-yet-fundamental problem that Group 90 members had to face perennially as advocates of this method, since nudity was, and still largely is, taboo in Singapore. Even if it had gained acceptance for the purposes of education at the time (which appeared to be a growing possibility), there were other impediments to surmount, such as an indifferent public and a general lack of understanding of the arts.

Ever since gaining independence in 1965, Lee Kuan Yew's Singapore embarked on an ambitious programme of nation-building – a remarkable period of materialistic growth that continued through the 1970s to the 1990s. With an eye on building up the nation into an international economic hub, official policies (particularly in education), placed an overwhelming emphasis on the fields of science and industry. As such, for the vast majority of Singapore's citizens who were caught up in the frenetic rat-race of survival, the enjoyment of or indulgence into the arts became activities they had neither the time nor incentive to pursue. In consequence, a whole generation grew up devoid of any understanding or even empathy for the few dedicated men and women who followed their passions and kept the flame

of their artistic hearts alive. So as Singapore progressed in leaps and bounds, with the media's spotlight constantly focused on increasing GDP figures and the gleaming new skyscrapers that popped up regularly, the artistic community was relegated to the fringes of society. At best, they were ignored. At worst, they were sometimes even ostracized.

So here was the conundrum facing Nama: on the one hand, given his outstanding credentials as a respected Ministry of Education scholar and educator, he was an integral part of the official mainstream and a crucial 'cog in the system'. Furthermore, as head of an old Tamil family, he was a strict patriarch in the traditional sense, where the virtues of honesty, courtesy, discipline and honour were sacrosanct. From these perspectives, he was a conformist. Yet paradoxically, and almost inexplicably, he also had an alter ego. One that seemed to have been at odds with his aforementioned profile. How did he reconcile the above with his free-spirited philosophical inquiry into existentialism – one that called upon his preferred language of expression: that of life-drawing? I can imagine his internal conflicts as he struggled to balance the diametrically opposing dualities of his personality. As he grew older, his private struggle became ever more discernible, as revealed by the ever-growing rigor in his workflow, wherein his artistic side clearly asserted dominance over his straightlaced 'civil-servant' public persona. Further hindering his artistic pursuits were issues of a more down-to-earth and practical nature. These included basic logistical matters such as the lack of available sitters and models. Group 90 found the solution through liberal-minded non-Singaporean backpacking travellers, who were willing to sit for some extra pocket money. They were often to be found congregating in the 'Little India' district, lodged amongst the numerous backpacker hostels there. Owing to reasons of cultural affinity and his familiarity of the place, Nama found himself ideally positioned to play the role of informal 'procurement manager' for potential sitters for his fellow hobbyists in Group 90. It was a strange conundrum indeed, yet according to his colleagues, he performed his role admirably thanks to his eloquent conversation skills and dignified, trust-worthy demeanour.

But the question still remains: why was he adamant in pursuing this art despite all the odds? Later-day generations may wonder: was it the excitement of exploring the potential of a new libertarian Singapore? The promise of an artistic landscape evolving towards a more emancipated future? Where the era in transition required bold visions - leaving the trappings of old systems and thinking behind? The scene was already rife with men and women, his peers in other fields, using their gifts and talents to progress

the nation. Namasivayam certainly had the talent for art and the urge to share his skills as an educator. Or was it just plainly - and purely - for the love of art? Sim Tong Khern, his lifelong friend and artistic colleague, poignantly recalled that right up to Nama's last days, as he lay in his death bed with hardly a breath left in him, he still kept requesting for a pencil and paper for a few final sketches. It is only today with the support of the government's Renaissance City Plan (implemented in stages since its establishment in 2000), that we have all the right support mechanisms to mount an exhibition and talk about these issues with such candid openness. It is indeed my deep regret that Nama is not here today to be acknowledged in person. However, I do think that should he have been around, he might have been unimpressed with the glorification of his estate, since his life's work was never about himself, but about advancement, education and the bigger picture for the art scene. Despite his impressive set of drawings and archive, Nama never had the aspirations to exhibit his works commercially or publicly due to the difficulties mentioned above. Although I have never had the honour of meeting the artist himself, I have, through our research, been inspired by his tenacity, generosity, and vision for the visual arts.

I thank the Namasivayam family - Nedumaran and Senta Wouterlood – for giving us unfettered access to this body of work. I also thank their close extended family friends from the late Mr. Narayanasamy's household in Seremban, Malaysia: Anand (who flew in from London), Mohan and Severam, who provided interviews and assisted us in accessing the relevant materials. Also of noteworthy mention are the National Gallery curators, Dr Adele Tan and Dr Roger Nelson. Rehina Pereira, whom over dinner, first pointed out to me that we did not have many local artists of Indian ethnicity, and which spurred the inquiry that ultimately led to Nama. Kanu Gupta for the introduction to her at one of his many social dinners. Thank you T.K. Sabapathy, Milenko Prvački and Woo Tien Wei, who were panellists for our talk and your collective advice. Mr. Kwa Chong Guan for your support and kindly gracing our exhibition's launch as Guest-of-Honour. Dr Fikret Ercan, Judy Cuthbertson (who flew in from Sydney) and Michel Elizabeth, for their impromptu insights into Nama's methodology at the launch. Thank you to my parents who made the thrilling drive with me to Seremban to collect the works. And finally, thank you to the sponsors who have enabled us to stretch our humble resources to produce this monograph.

Audrey Yeo
Founder, Yeo Workshop

“DRAWING A FIGURE CAN MAKE
THE DRAWING VALID.”

DRAWING A FIGURE OF ITSELF
DOESN'T MAKE A DRAWING.”

Solamalay Namasivayam 1926–2013

An Introductory Essay
by N. Nedumaran,
Audrey Yeo & Jolene Teo

"The beauty and structural aspects of the human figure have always intrigued me. Drawing them is fundamental to my art. I find it stimulating and challenging to study and discover its complexities, every time I draw the human figure. It appears to be a never-ending journey of exploration and discovery."

—Namasivayam

Spontaneous, evocative, fluid, accurate... these are some of the words that spring to mind when one describes the forms and figures depicted in Solamalay Namasivayam's works. He was a master of life drawing and figure study, who yet conducted himself with the greatest of humility despite his outstanding achievements as an artist. *Points of Articulation* is the artist's first major retrospective exhibition since his last solo exhibition, *Namasivayam's Figurative Expressions*, held in 2005 at Bhaskar's Arts Academy. While his significant contributions as one of the pioneers of figurative art in Singapore were previously overlooked, the gallery aims to bring to light his life as an adept artist and influential educator through this exciting and important archival project.

In his writings, Namasivayam once observed that "the most important areas of anatomy to be studied are the points of articulation." The title of the exhibition, *Points of Articulation*, was inspired by this quote as well as the artist's obsession with both figural perspectives and the human anatomy. Much like the classical giants of old such as Leonardo da Vinci, Namasivayam too visited the morgue to study and draw the human body while he was pursuing his studies in Sydney where he specialised in anatomy.¹ These visits, together with his studying of the relevant medical texts, allowed him to understand the human body from the inside out, and hence build a solid intellectual foundation when it came to capturing the figure with impeccable anatomical accuracy.

A prolific artist who practised a broad variety of painting styles throughout his lifetime, he nevertheless dedicated himself primarily to live figure drawing in his final decades. Over the course of that latter period, he produced a staggering number of live

figure works of which more than 150 have come to the attention of the gallery. This show has chosen to display a selection of his works in the form of a salon hang format, so as to showcase his wide artistic oeuvre as well as to emphasise the diligence that he displayed when it came to depicting the human form in various poses, shapes and sizes.

"We are honoured to be able to take on the research of this iconic and important artist. We thank the family's trust in us."

—Audrey Yeo, Founder of Yeo Workshop

Possessed of a dignified and self-effacing demeanour, Namasivayam conveyed his passion for art and the magnificence of the human form in a graciously fervent manner. By studying his life and calling, we also get to glimpse the broader struggles faced by artists who were often underappreciated or even forgotten by mainstream society. This exhibition is highly important not merely because it recognises Namasivayam's contributions to the field of figural art, but also due to the essential role that it performs in tracing the history and development of live figure drawing, an art form that was often not discussed in the past due to its stigmatised association with depraved "nudity" in the eyes of a conservative Singaporean society. In the absence of any club, either formal or ad hoc, that might have otherwise facilitated such an exploration of figurative art, Namasivayam, together with Brother Joseph McNally (the founder of LASALLE College of the Arts), Chia Wai Hon and Sim Thong Khern, founded an informal club named Group 90 in 1990. Although it was technically an unregistered collective of like-minded artists, it nevertheless played a significantly influential role - one that was arguably the very first of its kind in the region.

Looking beyond the exhibition itself, the gallery has been doing meticulous and painstaking research into the artist's past. Working together with the artist's son, N. Nedumaran, the gallery was able to uncover a vast plethora of materials ranging from photographs to his personal notebooks, sketchbooks and lecture notes. This massive archival project is still ongoing, due to its sheer scale as well as the personal importance of the artist himself. *Points of Articulation* wishes to provoke new inquiries into Singapore's art history and also seeks to acknowledge Namasivayam's significant contributions. The show invites visitors to personally investigate Namasivayam's life as an artist and educator by displaying archival materials and sketchbooks for their perusal. The gallery has also utilised an additional method of investigation by inviting four contemporary artists (who are also featured in this publication) to create works that respond to Namasivayam's own artwork as a means of exploring how figurative art has developed today.

This accompanying exhibition publication features some quotes about art by Namasivayam that were extracted from his personal notebooks and lecture notes. It also includes an essay by Associate Professor Dr Victor R. Savage, Visiting Senior Fellow, RSIS, as well as an interview with Sim Thong Khern, a fellow artist, Colombo Plan Scholarship coursemate and close friend of Namasivayam.

ARTISTIC STYLE

With a colossal body of work spanning more than half a century, Namasivayam's artistic repertoire varied from his post-graduation still life studies of inanimate objects (circa 1950s), outdoor landscapes (1960s onwards) to avant-garde experiments with abstract shapes, forms and patterns (1970s to early 1980s). Likewise, his media preferences were equally eclectic, incorporating the use of watercolours (circa 1950s), oil on canvases (1950s-1980s) to charcoal, pastels and ink-on-paper (1980s onwards).

His earliest encounters with art began during his primary and secondary school years in the 1930s, where art was part of the colonial education syllabus. He was trained in mainly still life drawing and

"Imaginary Composition" as part of his immersion in the pertinent syllabus for his Senior Cambridge Examinations.² He worked mostly with pencils and watercolours as oil paints were then too expensive for the general public to afford, which also meant that students were generally not being trained in their usage. Nevertheless, thanks to this early exposure to drawing and abstract artistic compositions, the young Namasivayam acquired a strong foundation in the study of perspectives and the portrayal of the world in three-dimensions. Indeed, these factors contributed immensely towards his figurative drawing skillset later on. During the last decades of his life, the use of pastels, gouache, acrylic and mixed media on paper became noticeably more pronounced. He was constantly experimenting with fresh ways to express the figural, whether it was through the production of abstract forms or selecting new media.

"Namasivayam is all for expressing the dynamism of the nude, bursting with an inner energy of Michelangelesque proportions. He works like one possessed who cannot wait to empty his pent-up emotions, carrying everything before him with his very vigorous brush strokes backed by an acute sense of distortion."³

—Chia Wai Hon

This exhibition showcases over twenty works that depict the human figure rendered in a variety of media, ranging from monochromatic charcoal or ink on paper, to coloured pieces done in pastels or gouache. These specimens were carefully selected from the later years of his extensive oeuvre and highlight his figural masterpieces. His critically acclaimed charcoal and pastel drawings have often been described, much akin to Chia Wai Hon's words above, to be bursting with a dynamic 'Michelangelesque' explosiveness. Depicting his models from unique angles, portrayed in assorted poses varying from upright seated positions to reclining ones, Namasivayam's figures were always perfectly rendered from a standing point of view. In doing so, he demonstrated his perfect understanding of human anatomy as well as his mastery of visual perspective. With bold, clean,

decisive strokes, he produced many remarkable images that exhibited intense and intangible qualities that can only be best described as 'monumental'.

As virtual 'two-dimensional sculptures on paper', his wide repertoire not only stood testament to his formidable technical expertise but also his deep knowledge of, and homage to, the grand classical masters of the human form ranging from Cellini to Rodin. Beyond studying Western artists, he also had great respect for and was familiar with Eastern and regional artists such as Malayan watercolourist Yong Mun Sen, whom he mentioned as an artist he was inspired by during his interview for the Colombo Scholarship programme.⁴ He worked with watercolours in the 1950s together with Yong, and pioneer Singaporean watercolourist Lim Cheng Hoe. Thus, it is possible to speculate that his early experiments with watercolours could have influenced his later usage of water based media (like ink) in the 1980s, to comfortably depict the figure in a spontaneous and fluid-like manner. Stylistically, he rarely neglected to capture the subtle lines and contours of his models' bodies by harmoniously melding his strikingly evocative images with an array of soft shading techniques. If on occasion these aesthetic subtleties were overlooked, as did happen from time to time, they were deliberate omissions - judgement calls made to provoke an overall dark, perhaps even menacing, quality of abstract existentialist struggle.

Namasivayam's art reflected his own approach to life in general. He was a kind, yet serious man who was keenly observant of the world around him. He was also highly intellectual, and possessed an aura of scholarly dignity that naturally garnered respect from those around him. Likewise, just like their creator, who never pandered to the frivolous or the banal, his figures were pure master-class studies of form. Replete with robust torsions and antithetic movement, they were often filled with purposeful dynamic tension. In fact, it is arguable that his enigmatically powerful images betrayed a far deeper subconscious quest – a lifelong struggle to strike an elusive balance between the complex artistic convictions buried within his restless soul, and the transient, materialistic world around him.

HIS WORK METHOD

A truly remarkable aspect about his work was that despite his formal artistic training and qualifications, he was never a commercial artist, but was instead someone who earned a respectable living as a professional educator with the civil service. Yet art was where his true calling lay, and he spent almost all of his after-office hours relieving the stresses of work by indulging in his private passion. As such, it should come as no surprise that one of his favourite quotes, found handwritten amongst his private papers, was from Pablo Picasso:

"Art washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life."

He was the 'total package', to use a term oft used in contemporary street parlance, for he took to art as naturally as a fish to water. He worked at his easel in his 'atelier', situated in the basement of his three-storeyed home in the leafy Thomson Road area, setting to work with an obsessive focus, mixing his paints to the strains of a Mussorgsky or Rimsky-Korsakov (or whoever else suited his mood) playing in the background on his 'LP' turntable. On other occasions, especially on weekends, he would stuff his easel into his car boot and drive off in search of whatever remote locations that still existed in Singapore. To quote Thomas Hardy, he often wished to be 'Far from the Madding Crowd', striving to capture the last vestiges of nature's untouched patches in an ever growing urban landscape. Whenever he felt dissatisfied with the encroachments of the remorselessly expanding concrete jungle around him, he would drive across the causeway in search of, quite literally, greener pastures in Malaysia.

Then there was his vast library of art books. Over the years, he amassed perhaps one of the finest private collections that an art connoisseur could come across in Singapore between the 1970s and the 1990s. His accumulated tomes covered a disparate variety of subjects, ranging from the lives of the great masters to a plethora of art techniques and contemporary trends. Indeed, it was a testament to, and natural manifestation of, his insatiable passion for reading voraciously

on anything that piqued his curiosity. As such, Namasivayam, who articulated his ideas effortlessly while effusing his attention grabbing old school British-English pronunciation and diction, was able to hold generations of lecture audiences spellbound by his dignified stage presence and encyclopaedic knowledge on a broad spectrum of matters - which weren't necessarily restricted to the world of art.

Finally, there was his gargantuan collection of sketchbooks, a culmination of a lifetime habit of carrying one wherever he went, be it on a drive or a walk. He would doodle perpetually - something for which he was known for since his earliest schooldays, and continued right till his final days lying in bed, weakened in body but not in mind or spirit. Indeed, if anyone could be described as having consummately 'lived and breathed' art during his or her lifetime, it was Namasivayam.

GROUP 90 AND LIFE DRAWING IN SINGAPORE

"Singapore did not have such a tradition due to a fear of offending different ethnic cultures and values. Nudity remained a taboo. It was even considered immoral to pose in the nude and distasteful to have the picture put up for public viewing."⁵

—Chia Wai Hon

In *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form*, Kenneth Clark distinguishes the nude from nakedness by indicating that the former is a form of art while the latter is the undressed physical body that is crude and vulgar.⁶ However, Singapore society failed to see that subtle distinction during the twentieth century when Namasivayam was active as an artist. Owing to the prevailing conservative social environment and cultural mores alluded to by Chia Wai Hon in the aforementioned quote, figurative art and the practice of life drawing faced many challenges in Singapore. These included the lack of a formal platform that would have enabled artists to learn and practice life drawing, as well as the difficulty in finding models who were willing to pose in the nude. Namasivayam, however, was able to tackle these issues through the establishment

of Group 90, which initially sprouted around a core of retired lecturers and educators – all former senior civil servants with the Ministry of Education. He introduced life drawing into the syllabus of LASALLE College of the Arts, and gilded by his impeccable reputation as a man of high integrity and honour, he was also able to procure the trust and services of willing models.

Despite his unfortunate absence from Singapore's art historical narratives, Namasivayam was not by any means a newcomer to the local arts scene, for he had a long history of activity dating back to the 1950s, having participated in exhibitions as a member of the Singapore Art Society (SAS).⁷ Back then, the SAS and the Nanyang Art Academy were the only two formal organisations in existence which provided artists with opportunities to draw, paint, attend classes and participate in exhibitions together. Indeed, Namasivayam's outstanding aptitude for art was such that it soon came to the attention of, and was recognised by, Mr Ho Kok Hoe, the then President of the SAS, who subsequently gave him a strong recommendation for a place in the prestigious Colombo Plan Scholarship program, after having reviewed his works.⁸ Another person who also played a brief but critical role in his scholarship acceptance was Mr Goh Kong Beng, then President of the Singapore Teachers Union, who was also impressed by the potential he saw. In consequence, Namasivayam duly embarked for Australia in 1957 to attend the Fine Arts Course in Sydney, and eventually graduated in 1961 as a fully trained and competent art exponent.

Yet remarkably, upon his return to Singapore, he was destined to spend a significant proportion of his life and career as a teacher and educationist, despite his art qualifications. It is important to understand this particular aspect of his life as an artist, for it was only after his retirement that he truly became a specialist art lecturer per se, upon joining LASALLE College of the Arts in 1987. Subsequently, at LASALLE, he immediately made his mark by planning the syllabus and introducing Life Drawing into the Fine Arts curriculum that same year. But these achievements were to come much later, for decades earlier, the socio-cultural landscape in Singapore, as far as avenues for

artistic studies were concerned, was far less sanguine. So although he had received his initial introduction to life drawing in the late 1950s in Sydney, there were hardly any opportunities to practice it following his return. This situation was owed in no small measure to the fact that hardly anybody around was familiar with life drawing, since only a small minority had access to the privilege of travelling and studying abroad back then.⁹ For the vast majority of people in Singapore, engrossed in their day-to-day struggles of making ends meet in a nascent post-colonial economy, art in general was not seen as a career objective, but a bourgeois indulgence with little correlation with the harsh realities of life. Thus any attempts to moot an introduction of life figure drawing not only faced the prevalent apathy towards art in general, but a culturally ingrained Asiatic aversion to what was then viewed as a taboo topic.

However, as someone who had prior exposure to the academic discipline of life drawing in Australia, the open-minded Namasivayam had no qualms about taking up the mantle of introducing it as an officially sanctioned subject for study in Singapore. Aided by his dignified persona and ability to articulate his views with great academic clarity, he was able to negotiate the glass walls of doubt and win over the sceptics. This quest finally came to fruition many years later, after his retirement, with the key role he played in the founding of Group 90, the first art collective specifically focused on life drawing and the development of figurative art in Singapore. In doing so, he helped provide a formal and respectable means of learning and practising the discipline, which had hitherto been confined to the realms of the world of private art studios.

"The reason why I started it was because I wanted to concentrate on the human figure. There was no such club... I wanted it to be a formal one because drawing from the figure was not a thing that people liked here."¹⁰ With this goal in mind, Namasivayam gathered a group of like-minded lecturers from LASALLE College of the Arts who shared his interest in the human figure, and started Group 90 with them. In the words of Sim Thong Khern, Namasivayam's old friend from his student days in Australia, the artists involved in that endeavor felt that their interests in the human

figure and life drawing had to be expanded. But most crucially, Mr Sim underlined the all-important context: "And because of our background, we were the right people to project an image of life drawing as an art form with the potential to thrive in Singapore."¹¹ The group was formalised in 1990 (hence its name) and held its inaugural exhibition *FIGURAMA* in the same year. As a founding member who was credited with conceiving the idea for the group and bringing its initial members together, Namasivayam became a central figure in the development of figurative art in Singapore.

"By and large, the majority [of Group 90 members] follow an academic approach, presenting the nude as accurately as they possibly can ... Draughtsmanship is their main focus with some opting for the quality of a spontaneous quick sketch while others strive for a more complete finish. Then there are those with an Expressionist tendency, who are ruled more by impulse and emotion in their handling of subject matter and media, than accuracy in drawing. They distort or exaggerate to maximise visual impact, keeping within the bounds of representational art. Artists in the category [include] Namasivayam... They work fast to capture felt sensations that are transitory and highly elusive."¹²

—Chia Wai Hon

As part of Group 90, Namasivayam participated in several key exhibitions alongside other prominent artists like Chia Wai Hon, Liu Kang, Sim Thong Khern and Brother Joseph McNally. As the fraternity expanded, it came to include other well established names like Ng Eng Teng, Loh Khee Yew and Dr Earl Lu. As a measure of the level of camaraderie that prevailed over this pioneering group, it is notable that it was wholly voluntary and self-sustaining, and relied solely on the personal contributions of its members in order to pay for the expenses incurred by hiring models and organising exhibitions.

In representing the forefront of life drawing in

Singapore, Group 90 provided a vital opportunity for an important aspect of aesthetic study to occur, while simultaneously enabling this nuanced discipline to develop further. The group generally adhered to the classical European approach towards life drawing, wherein the human nude became the central locus and foundation of art. The group also allowed artists to learn from each other while also furnishing them with a platform to showcase their figurative artwork. As such, the group held exhibitions almost annually, organising a total of six public exhibitions until 2003 when the original group split into three groups (one of which retained the name Group 90) as the space for the practice of life drawing in LASALLE became unavailable.

"So I got in, in 1987. I got into that school, LASALLE, to teach art for the first time. I was able to use my first-hand knowledge. I think it was the most enjoyable part of my whole life. I am doing a kind of job which is right at the core of my heart ... I mean the whole stuff of me is art and nothing else."¹³

But the challenges facing this arcane artistic journey were not yet over, despite the apparent progress made through LASALLE and Group 90. For in Singapore, the study of the nude was still seen as a Western concept inherited from Classical Greek and Roman sculptural traditions that emphasised the depiction of idealised figures. Although training in life drawing was commonly offered at Western fine arts academies the world over, it was still extremely rare in Singapore. Things came to an impasse in 1990 when Namasivayam left LASALLE, after the particular department which conducted figure drawing was discontinued on account of the notion that it was not an integral part of art as a whole. However, attitudes within the college's academic fraternity soon began to respond to the ebb and flow of global artistic trends, such as a resurgence in emphasis on figure drawing later on.

As such, it was an extremely sanguine period for Namasivayam when he was eventually invited back by LASALLE to resurrect the defunct figure drawing classes. He subsequently returned

in 1992 on the following condition: "I'll write my own syllabus and I'll teach the way I want to teach it ... But I'll come back for the sheer love of figure drawing without any encumbrances to my approach to things."¹⁴ In retrospect, thanks to his uncompromising perseverance, the inclusion of figurative drawing within the curriculum became crucial to the development of figurative art, since it provided a formal platform as well as the essential resources for aspiring artists who wished to draw from a model, rather than being confined to depictions on plaster casts and photographs.

Finally, there was yet one other obstacle to be surmounted - one of a far more basic nature, but which carried the potential of derailing the whole project in the absence of a solution. With the establishment of this platform, there was now a need for models who would be willing to sit for these sessions. However, in an Asiatic and predominantly conservative society, it was extremely difficult to find people who were willing to pose in the nude. Yet, where life drawing classes were concerned, it was essential to recruit live models who were willing to sit in, since only then could students capture the human anatomy as accurately as possible by studying the muscles and bones of the figure in its entirety. Namasivayam was able to overcome these sensitive difficulties as he lived in an area where there were many overseas visitors and hitchhikers, who generally carried less inhibitions than the locals.¹⁵ With an approachable, dignified and diplomatic nature, he was able to easily form connections with such foreigners who were willing to model for him in exchange for a stipend.

In this manner, along with his solid reputation as a man of honour and integrity, he was able to procure the services of a broad spectrum of models, both male and female, who possessed a wide range of complexions and physical feature Namasivayam was able to capture the essence of his various models in a very raw form, stripped of idealisations and conventional standards of beauty. Indeed, he was fascinated by the imperfections of the human body, and strove to capture them in his drawings, regardless of whether they were uncomplimentary bulges of the belly or folds

of the skin. This proclivity of his resulted in the creation of intensely powerful and evocative figures, which yet often managed to betray a subtle sense of vulnerability.

LEGACY

“Life has not always been kind to artists. But it is the measure of the passionate artist that has made many misunderstood artists to drive them to express themselves continuously even though public recognition has not been forthcoming. My school art teacher Namasivayam or Nama as he was called, symbolises the passionate creativity of a hidden artist whose story needs to be told.”

—Dr Victor R. Savage, Visiting Senior Fellow RSIS

It is difficult, perhaps even impossible to record the presence of every single artist who ever emerged, or is still emerging within the ever-evolving Singaporean art scene. This unfortunate practical reality also applies to artistic trends or movements that may have come and gone without a trace. Hence, artists like Namasivayam somehow slipped through the cracks of historical narratives, slid into obscurity over the passage of time, and were completely forgotten with the transition of a new generation. This ever present problem in research scholarship was addressed by art historian T.K. Sabapathy, when he pointed out the need for a critical re-examination of how the documentation of Singapore's art history should be approached:

“At this juncture it will be worth remembering that the history of art is not devoted merely to the commemoration of the great, old or dead... it should...[also be cognizant]...of the conditions, materials, institutions, works and personages in the sphere of art existing in Singapore. They make up the context of art and are available for study. The frontiers of critical enterprise are beckoning. Critical histories of art in Singapore can be written.”¹⁶

Therefore, with his advisory in mind, it is obvious that the study of Namasivayam and his contributions to Singaporean art history does play an important part in this process of critical re-examination, as well as the 'filling of the gaps'. As part of the process of examining Namasivayam's legacy, four contemporary artists were carefully curated and chosen to respond to Namasivayam's works and writings in their own respective ways, in order to trace how figurative art has evolved as a discipline, as well as to illustrate the fact that it remains relevant today. Alvin Ong's *Wish You Were Here* was made in response to a sketch by Namasivayam, but takes a different approach to the figure by portraying it in a twisted surreal manner and rendering it in oil on canvas. It presents a stark contrast to Namasivayam's anatomically accurate figures, thus serving to demarcate life drawing in its current contemporary version from the variety that prevailed back then. Jason Wee's text-based drawing crafts a picture via the sole medium of the written word. He was selected to provide a purely textural approach to the figure which deviates sharply from the exclusively visual one that is often regarded as being synonymous with the discipline of art itself. Mike HJ Chang explores the human form via a three dimensional medium by contributing a sculpture in response to Namasivayam's works, a decision that stems from his general curiosity towards shapes, forms and objects.

Lastly, like the late Namasivayam, Milenko Prvački likewise pursued the path of an artist-educator, having been a lecturer and Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts at LASALLE College of Arts. He is currently a Senior Fellow at the college. He also knew Namasivayam personally and was a close friend of his, as reflected by his good-natured caricature that candidly captures a fleeting moment in Namasivayam's demeanour. These contemporary works are shown under the "Contemporary Response" section at our venue partner, Art Outreach. This publication also features an essay by Associate Professor Dr Victor R. Savage as well as an interview with Sim Thong Khern. Dr Savage was a student of the artist and a collector of his works while Mr Sim was a close family friend of

Namasivayam, in addition to being a fellow founding member of Group 90 and Colombo Plan Scholarship coursemate (1957-1961). Both the essay and the interview paint clear pictures of the historical context within which Namasivayam lived and created his works. In addition, they provide fascinating insights into his persona through fondly recalled vignettes of the man, his life, and his artistic practice.

“My wish is to take my last breath with a drawn line.”

Namasivayam, The Sunday Times, August 14, 2011

As he lay in bed during his final days, the artist's close friend and fellow artist Sim Thong Khern visited him and noticed that Namasivayam was still clutching a sketchbook while requesting the aid of a nurse to facilitate his execution of a final drawing. Deeply moved by Namasivayam's passionate, undying love for art, he recalled: "He was able to create something on the drawing board simply because he was a born artist due to his own belief in himself. It was a truly wonderful thing. I was very touched, I was there. I saw it happen. I knew exactly what he wanted to do. Mr Sim then uttered the following simple yet poignant words to his old friend: 'Nama, thank you so much, this is marvelous.'" And true to form, Namasivayam left this earthly realm a few days later, still clutching a pen and his beloved sketchbook. He had lived up to his wish ... and kept his word.

1. Namasivayam, interview by Joyce Fan, *NAMASIVAYAM* s/o K.A. *Solamalay*, National Archives Singapore. 4 June 1997, Reel/Disc 9 of 10, Accession Number 001896.
2. Namasivayam, interview by Joyce Fan, *NAMASIVAYAM* s/o K.A. *Solamalay*, National Archives Singapore. 3 June 1997, Reel/Disc 4 of 10, Accession Number 001896.
3. Chia Wai Hon, "GROUP 90 AND THE NUDE" in *Art of the Nude*. (Group 90: Singapore, 1994).
4. Namasivayam, interview by Joyce Fan, *NAMASIVAYAM* s/o K.A. *Solamalay*, National Archives Singapore. 3 June 1997, Reel/Disc 6 of 10, Accession Number 001896.
5. Chia Wai Hon, "Group 90 and the Art of the Nude" in *NUspiration*. (Group 90, National Arts Council, Lee Foundation Singapore, The Singapore Arts Federation: Singapore, 2008.)
6. Clark, K. *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1956.) as cited in Yang Yilin, "“Love Live the Nude!”: the production of the nude in twentieth-century Singapore," Capstone for BA (Hons), (Yale NUS College: 2019) p. 8.
7. Namasivayam, interview by Joyce Fan, *NAMASIVAYAM* s/o K.A. *Solamalay*, National Archives Singapore. 3 June 1997, Reel/Disc 6 of 10, Accession Number 001896.
8. Ibid.
9. Sim Thong Khern, interview by Audrey Yeo and N. Nedumaran. 11 September 2019.
10. Namasivayam, interview by Joyce Fan, *NAMASIVAYAM* s/o K.A. *Solamalay*, National Archives Singapore. 4 June 1997, Reel/Disc 9 of 10, Accession Number 001896.
11. Sim Thong Khern, interview by Audrey Yeo and N. Nedumaran. 11 September 2019.
12. Chia Wai Hon, 'NUSENSE', Introduction. Singapore: Procomp Printset, 2002, pp.10-11.
13. Namasivayam, interview by Joyce Fan, *NAMASIVAYAM* s/o K.A. *Solamalay*, National Archives Singapore. 4 June 1997, Reel/Disc 8 of 10, Accession Number 001896.
14. Namasivayam, interview by Joyce Fan, *NAMASIVAYAM* s/o K.A. *Solamalay*, National Archives Singapore. 4 June 1997, Reel/Disc 9 of 10, Accession Number 001896.
15. Sim Thong Khern, interview by Audrey Yeo and N. Nedumaran. 11 September 2019.
16. Yang Yilin, "“Love Live the Nude!”: the production of the nude in twentieth-century Singapore," Capstone for BA (Hons), (Yale NUS College: 2019) p. 12.

Opening Remarks for Points of Articulation

“USE MINIMAL LINES TO CAPTURE THE ESSENCE OF A FACE OR GESTURE. A STROKE OF THE BRUSH BECOMES A PLATE OF FOOD, A WRIGGLY SCRIBBLE BECOMES A FEATHERY HAT.”

Guest of Honour:
Mr Kwa Chong Guan

A very good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, and especially to Mr Nedumaran, son of Solamalay Namasivayam and other members of his family. I am deeply honoured to have been invited by Ms Audrey Yeo and Mr Nedumaran to say a few words at the opening of this retrospective exhibition on Solamalay Namasivayam, who passed on six years ago at the age of eighty-seven. The extensive archive of sketchbooks, notebooks, lecture notes and large oeuvre of paintings in water colours, oil on canvasses, charcoal, pastels and ink on paper Namasivayam left, has enabled Ms Audrey Yeo and her colleagues at Yeo Workshop to mount this retrospective exhibition, with a deep understanding of what motivated Namasivayam as an artist and educator and assess his status as an artist. I join Ms Yeo in thanking Namasivayam's family for opening up this archive, without which I doubt this exhibition could have been mounted.

This exhibition however raises a fundamental question about our art world. Why and how have some artists made it into the pantheon of artists whose works are exhibited in our Singapore Art Museum (SAM) and National Gallery (NGS), while others like Namasivayam are forgotten? A simple and common-sense answer would be that not all artists are gifted with the passion and talents to produce artworks which inspire us and are worthy of taking into our museum collections. This exhibition however, clearly shows that Namasivayam had all the qualities of a great artist, with mastery of a variety of mediums from water colours to oils and pastels and ink on paper depicting a variety of subjects, with figurative art and figure drawing and painting as subjects for which he is best known.

So, could it be that Namasivayam failed to get into the old National Museum Art Gallery or its successor, the Singapore Art Museum and today, the National Gallery because of his preference for painting nudes? Could it

be, as Chia Wai Hon and other art critics have pointed out, that painting nudes was considered vulgar and an affront to the aesthetic sensibilities of our more traditional Asian communities? But this would be to blur the now well established distinction between the 'nude' and 'naked' in art. The 'nude' attempts to capture the ideal of the unclothed human body while the 'naked' is about gazing at the undressed human body and its alluring sensuality, eroticism and sexuality. Namasivayam's interest in capturing the essence of the most basic form of art, the human figure, was at one level, to capture with clinical anatomical detail the human body with all its warts and wrinkles. At another level, as fellow artist Chia Wai Hon says, Namasivayam's drawings of the human figure "expresses the dynamism of the nude bursting with the inner energy of Michelangelesque proportions." Was Namasivayam therefore simply ahead of his time in focusing on the nude?

This exhibition suggests that if Namasivayam did not make it into the pantheon of artists exhibited in our art museums, then it was because he saw himself more as an educator and teacher, who was a competent practitioner of what he was teaching. And it was only after he retired from teaching that he focussed his attention on promoting figure drawing as a respectable genre of painting. Together with his fellow artist who shared an interest in depicting the nude human body, Namasivayam and Brother Joseph McNally led the formation of Group 90 in 1990 to promote artistic mastery of drawing or painting the nude human form as a basic skill of painting. The Group met on Saturdays at the LaSalle's premises and included professional artists such as Ng Eng Teng, Liu Kang, Choy Weng Yang (who was also an old National Museum curator and art critic), art enthusiasts like the surgeon-art collector Dr Earl Lu; Sir Roy Calne and art writer and artist Chia Wai

Hon, Sim Thong Khern and Loh Khee Yew, both art teachers like Namasivayam. Group 90 organised six exhibitions between 1990 and 2003, when the Group folded up. The impact and legacy of these six Group 90 exhibitions in generating public interest in figure drawing and painting as a distinct and acceptable category of art is an issue art writers and historians will continue to discuss, but the role of Namasivayam as the lead and central person in the Group is clear.

Many of the Group 90 artists were professional artists who earned an income of sorts from the sale of their art works. Namasivayam was not among them. Perhaps this is why Namasivayam is not on the pantheon of artists exhibited in our museum galleries. Namasivayam did not, like his fellow-artists, get an art gallery to represent him and display his works for sale. Namasivayam, it would appear, also did not exhibit his works widely, like his fellow artists. These six Group 90 exhibitions and a solo exhibition that ran for a week in February 2008 at Bhaskar's Arts Academy, appeared to have been Namasivayam's main showing of his work. As such, Namasivayam did not catch the attention of art writers and historians, like his other fellow artists who exhibited widely. Without a gallery or studio to represent him, and art writers and critics to write about him, Namasivayam remained largely unknown to the community of art collectors and even to the museum curators. I checked with a couple of younger curators at our art museum who confessed they were unaware of Namasivayam, although they were aware of other members of Group 90. As such it is understandable that Namasivayam never quite made it into the collections of our art museums.

Restated, the reality of our art world is that for any artists intending to earn some income from their paintings, they have to first and foremost get a gallery or studio to represent them and exhibit their works.

Second, they must catch the attention of art critics and writers to draw attention of art collectors and museum curators to their works; and third, they must impress museum curators and their acquisition committees to acquire their works for the museum collection. It would appear that Namasivayam did not bother to work towards meeting these three criteria during his lifetime.

I am therefore delighted that Namasivayam has finally found an art gallery in Yeo Workshop to represent him and work with his son, Mr Nedumaran, to write a major reassessment of his work in the introductory essay to the exhibition catalogue. I commend Yeo Workshop for initiating this major art archival project. Ms Audrey Yeo and her younger colleague Ms Jolene Teo represent a new and younger generation of art writers who are prepared to take on the daunting task of helping to document our art history. In doing so, they are making invaluable contributions towards this important task, which is something our art museums should be doing, but are unable to do so because of more pressing demands on their time and energy. Indeed, the outsourcing of this archiving of our art history to galleries and studios like Yeo Workshop may be one way ahead.

I hope that this retrospective exhibition on Solamalay Namasivayam will earn him a place in our art museums and that galleries like Yeo Workshop will get the institutional and funding support necessary to continue this archival documentation of our art history.

Mr Kwa Chong Guan

Adjunct Assoc. Prof., Dept of History, NUS

—
Former Chairman, National Archives Board

—
Former Director, National Museum of Singapore

“DON'T BE
DESULTORY IN
YOUR WORK...”

“...ONCE YOU START
YOUR DRAWING,
STICK TO IT.”

The Figure in Art: S. Namasivayam

Dr Victor R. Savage

I. INTRODUCTION

Life has not always been kind to artists. But it is the measure of 'the passionate artist' that has made many misunderstood artists to remain driven to express themselves continuously, even though public recognition has not been forthcoming. My school art teacher Namasivayam or 'Nama' as he was called, symbolised the passionate creativity of a hidden artist whose story needs to be told.

In Singapore, where money and materialism seem to drive the economy, where status appears to be the measure of success, and where personal esteem in polite company is not given much weight, the pursuit of art has never been a career that parents do encourage. Art has never been an expression of the cultured person in Singapore society even though in Chinese civilization it was a measure of the literati and high social status. Much less an Indian artist, where, as a minority in Singapore, art recognition is hard to come by. Indeed few Singapore Indian artists can be counted. Do we as a multi-racial society have art works by other minorities? Hoisington, the Eurasian artist, gave Singapore a flourish of artistic creativity in the 60s and 70s, but left the Merlion landscape like stealth. And so it will be for Nama if we don't recognise these hidden gems. When Nama passed away in 2013, his art was rarely heard of beyond the realms of a closed circle of aficionados. Yet what he had left behind is a treasure-trove legacy of many works, both completed and half-finished, awaiting recognition.

II. NAMA'S ARDUOUS ROAD TO SELF-DISCOVERY

An Indian by birth, Nama came from a large land-owning family hailing from the rural heartlands of South India, who were migrants in Singapore. Nama must have had a difficult childhood, moving from India to British Malaya, where he studied in Victoria Institution in Kuala Lumpur before finally arriving in Singapore in 1950. He had weathered through many challenging and varied environments, including his teenage years during the Japanese Occupation in Malaya and the infamous 'Death Railway' in Siam, which disrupted his education. All these shifting existential experiences gave him invaluable insights

into people, circumstances and hardships. Yet despite these immense difficulties, Nama never lost sight of his abiding passion in art. He successfully completed his formal art training (1957-1961) under the Colombo Plan in Sydney Australia, majoring in figure drawing and painting. At a time when art was considered a luxury and an accessory in living, Nama moved against the postwar pragmatic concerns: he followed what his heart and passion wanted. It was an internal calling that could only be satisfied by himself. Fortunately, he was matured enough to make his own decisions.

III. THE ICONIC ART TEACHER

Nama was an art sojourner, a restless figure seeking comfort and solace in his challenge in creative expression. By genetics and passionate interests, Nama explored a world of human figure expression. He was able to cultivate his artistic talents in Australia and become an art teacher in Singapore's secondary schools. As an art teacher he was passionate and encouraging. He wanted students to dabble in their own free creative expressions, to paint in technicolours, and to take each painting as a joy of personal expression. He was an 'art radical', breaking the conventional school bonds of conservatism and encouraging students to vent their creative expressions. He liked the Jackson Pollock approach to free colour expressionism and was wildly excited when students set free their colours in a similar fashion. In his husky and at times high pitched voice, he would bellow his words of encouragement, much to the amusement of many students. Students did not feel confined to set themes and art techniques; they felt liberated. He brought a breath of fresh air to school art. Nama did not teach art because it was his teaching assignment, he taught art because he relished in its passionate enjoyment. Influenced by his Australian art education, he brought along his knowledge of 20th century artistic masters and contemporary trends in 'expressionism' into the classrooms of local schools.

IV. THE NAMA ART NARRATIVE

Despite encouraging his students in school art lessons to freely express themselves, to dabble in a riot of colours, and to paint what they saw or imagined, Nama kept his own artistic interests like a personal

secret. In fact, his personal art was radically different from what he encouraged and taught at school. The first time I saw a public exhibition of Nama's varied figure drawings and paintings, I found great difficulty in relating to him as my school art teacher. There had never been a single hint of figure paintings in school lessons! Figure painting demands skill, talent, powers of observation and discipline. His figures varied from charcoal outlines to pastels and oil paintings. While in school he gave us the impression he enjoyed technicolors and Pollock's wild and free expressions, Nama's figure paintings, on the contrary, were far from colourful: somber in black, gray and yellow ochre colours. He wanted his powerful figures, male and female, young and old, White and Asian, to speak for themselves. Nama believed painting required perseverance, devotion and patience. His advice to students was not be "desultory" in their work, which means "once you start your drawing, stick to it".

His charcoal figure outlines displayed an economy of artistic expression in delivering the form he wanted. Far from the free imagination he espoused in our classroom art, Nama's figure paintings were based on human models that required keen and precise observation. One can see it took him years to perfect his artistic abilities of control, discipline and expression of his human forms. In his own words, he observed that "with practice" one could become "extremely accurate in judging angles and proportions". His figures were mainly incomplete human torsos, not muscular, but rather imperfect bodies. Despite the still life, two-dimensional portrayals of human bodies, Nama's figures were far from passive; he captured human bodies in various actions and activities, and that required an understanding of which particular human muscles were being activated. He was a classical artist with an aesthetic taste. Most of his figure paintings were nudes, sans clothing, as the art of the ancient Greeks and Romans were known for. It would seem that the highest aesthetic expression for Nama was the raw portrayals of the human form. As he noted, an artist who draws figures "is more skilled than those who do other subjects". He did not believe in cultural embellishments. In a conservative Asian setting, Nama's pursuit of nude human paintings has not been easily

accepted. It is no wonder that most of his paintings have been stored away and when exhibited, often invited the curiosity of discreet visitors who approached the subject matter with a certain amount of discomfort.

V. WHY THE HUMAN FORM: FIGURATIVELY SPEAKING

Nothing in his pedagogic profession as an art teacher gave away Nama's perennial hidden interest in the human figure. For him it was the ultimate challenge in creativity. Giving life, meaning and expression to human forms seemed to be for him the ultimate creative expression. He spent his whole life time perfecting the art of figure drawing. When one looks at Nama's figure works, it seems evident he was not concerned with human bodily perfection. His human bodies were nothing to be admired; they were just ordinary people. But he was concerned with the quotidian realities of human form, the everyday people he met. He was obsessed with the observation of people.

Unlike landscape art, Nama did not have to travel to places to paint cultural landscapes. His art subjects were found everywhere, on the streets, in coffee-shops, and in crowded places. It was strange that despite his quiet and reserved disposition, Nama chose human beings as a subject of curiosity, fascination and interest. It was as though he found a way of communicating with people through art without engaging with them directly. He was after all a shy person at heart, though not overtly an introvert. One is left to wonder what his thoughts were behind each figure he drew. After all he left behind a treasure trove of sketches in numerous sketchbooks.

In a conservative Asian environment, the portrayal of human figures in the nude was something Singaporean households found difficult to support, much less exhibit on their home walls. Unlike Europe, where the nude human form was an ultimate creative expression, in Asia human forms were never seen as a challenge for artists. In East Asia in particular, human forms were often underplayed in art. The underlying Chinese and Japanese philosophy of human-to-nature relationships was to show that human beings were only part of nature and not the dominant feature of the environment.

That is why in Chinese landscape paintings, human beings are portrayed in minuscule forms in streams, mountain paths and forested areas that require a magnifying glass to be scrutinised. The concept of the dominant human figure in art is thus a Western artistic tradition. As such, Western philosophy underscored the importance of human beings and the individual. In fact, unlike Chinese art, Western landscape art, in highlighting the physical landscape, came late in the 18th century through the works of Nicolas Poussin, Claude Lorrain, John Constable, and Salvador Rosa.

VI. NAMA'S ARTISTIC OEUVRE

Doing justice in capturing a lifetime of Nama's oeuvre in art is not an easy task. How do you sum up one man's lifetime of creative expressions? He lived and loved art. He was also the most dominant and enduring figure in the genre of human art. Indeed, his life was art transformed into reality. Others might verbalise their lives through endless stories, but Nama left a legacy of his personal philosophy in artistic expressions. He was a quiet person who let his art do the talking. He unashamedly displayed his passions and love for art. Perhaps there is a Nama in each of us – that creative spark waiting to be released and recognised, but yet afraid to be uncovered. Unlike Nama, we have tucked away our personal creative expressions, hidden our talents, been restless with our ambitions, and diffused our personal interests.

Nama led a full life as husband, father, teacher, mentor, and friend. A man of not many words, he had a quiet disposition, although when necessary, he was capable of remarkable public eloquence. It seemed difficult for an artist like Nama to pursue his artistic passions whilst trying to remain operational within the confines of both a home or work environment. His passion in art consumed his whole life. He was not a professional artist, which was just as well, because his figure paintings were never done with a commercial intent. Ironically, because of his regular career as an art teacher, Nama had the luxury of privately pursuing his obsession with understanding the human form. That undiluted attention to one subject is rare even amongst professional artists.

In the process of his lifetime commitment to art and creative manifestations, Nama had bequeathed to generations of younger Singaporeans the meaning of maintaining one's creative interests, of perfecting one's talent, of being disciplined in life and steadfastly upholding and fulfilling one's personal dreams. In a society where materialism and money govern morals, behaviour, and lifestyles, Nama's simple and creative life provided an example of how one man discovered his own value in living, and which propelled a lifetime of creative narrations. Like Nama, one should be happy with oneself without unnecessary material accoutrements.

Wednesday 11 September 2019

In Conversation

Dr Victor R. Savage is Adjunct Senior Fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), NTU, Singapore. He was the former head of the Department of Geography and Coordinator of the Southeast Asian Programme in NUS. He was the former President of the Commonwealth Geographers' Bureau/Association involving 54 countries. He has been involved in the Sembawang Marine (S) Greenwave Competition since 2003. Among his more recent publications are *Street Names in Singapore: A Study in Toponymics* (4th ed) (2023), Marshall Cavendish; *Lion City Narratives: Singapore through Western Eyes* (2022), World Scientific Publishing; *The Naga Awakens: Growth and Change in Southeast Asia* (1998), with Lily Kong and Warwick Neville (eds), Times Academic Press. His latest conference paper was "As One with Nature: Southeast Asian Aesthetic Expressions" which was presented at the SEAMEO SPAFA International Conference on Southeast Asia Archaeology and Fine Arts, December 2021 (pp289-308).

Mr Sim Thong Khern, Founding Member of Group 90
Audrey Yeo & N. Nedumaran



BIOGRAPHY

I am a Singaporean artist who was born in 1930. Possessing a keen interest in art since my youth, I initially made my mark as a popular street artist. Filled with determination to acquire formal artistic training, I eventually obtained a place at the National Art School in Sydney under the auspices of the Colombo Plan Scholarship program. Upon my graduation in 1961, I subsequently returned to Singapore where I became an art educator at various institutions such as the Teachers' Training College, its successor the Institute of Education and Hwa Chong Junior College. I also attained recognition as an artist in my own right as demonstrated by the bestowal of several awards upon me for my accomplishments in the field of art and design.

In 1989, along with Namasivayam and Brother Joseph McNally,¹ I played an instrumental role in founding an artist collective called Group 90. My involvement with Group 90 provided me with the opportunity to finally sketch depictions of the human figure based on my own personal observations of live models, an activity that I had been previously unable to carry out. I continue to remain an active artist to this very day, specialising primarily in the production of oil and acrylic paintings.

RELATIONSHIP

There were three of us who attended the Colombo Plan Scholarship program.² The third was another artist named Suri bin Mohyani³ who enrolled together with us on the program. At that point in time, Mohyani was the only ethnic Singapore Malay artist who had made a prominent name for himself. Initially, we intended to study advertising art to prepare for our future technical education. However, we found fine art more to our liking since it was not as restrictive as commercial art. After coming back, we all chose educational careers. I was first posted to a secondary school and then was subsequently sent to the Teachers' Training College as a lecturer of art. Nama was engaged at a tertiary institution. We used to get together with other Singapore artists like Lim Cheng Hoe who produced water colour artworks. We would set aside some time for art and go together for outings

during the weekends to places such as the seaside or various kampungs to paint outdoors. Years later, when Brother Joseph McNally founded LASALLE College,⁴ he let Nama use a studio for whatever art making activities that he desired to engage in, after which Nama roped in others such as myself.

I was like a brother to him. We would go out together to Pasir Panjang and many other places in order to sketch and draw. When he was hospitalised in 2013, I went there to be with him. A marvellous thing that I observed was that on the day before he died, he was holding a sketchbook. He was asking the nurse to hold the sketchbook. With the other hand, he was holding a bag. The nurse didn't understand what he was trying to do. She asked, "What is it for? Why is this sick person passing the drawing board to me?" I told the nurse that he wanted to start drawing. The nurse was confused: "Draw what?" I said, "He's an artist". Even towards the end, on the day before he passed away, he was able to create something on the drawing board simply because he was a born artist and his own belief in himself. It was a truly wonderful thing. I was very touched. I was there, I saw it happen. I knew exactly what he wanted to do. I said "Nama, thank you so much, this is marvelous". Of course, it didn't look like what he normally did, but it was still something remarkable since it showed how dedicated he was. At the end, even on his sick bed, he still was able to do that.

ABOUT NAMA

It is important to draw public attention to his art since he was a quiet person who did not self-publicise. But the people who knew him had a nickname for him. They used to call him a crazy person since in school he was like a mad artist. For example, he used to paint his own body. On the body you can erase certain types of paint off, but not oil. He used to take off his shirt and show off his bare body. In the past, his body was quite good looking. He did it partly because it was so hot, but also, in order to teach people that certain colours were more permanent and accordingly, should not be played with. Children used to say he was a magician since he would do magic with colours. Of course, he would use turpentine to wipe it away afterwards!

When your daddy passed away, I felt as if half my body had gone because we were so close. Whenever we were together, regardless of whatever we would do, we would always complement and support each other. I knew your daddy when he was in school in the 1950s, painting his body. I asked others, "Who is he?" They said he was "Nama-su". I replied that I would like to know him. They said if you wanted to talk to him, you've got to be careful because he has a temper. If he doesn't like you, he will chase you out, screaming, "Don't disturb me, leave me alone". I said that I only wanted to ask him about the things that I needed to buy in order to start creating my own artwork.

I learned from him how to paint in oil. After we succeeded in completing our respective first paintings, we both submitted our paintings for an art competition. Mine was selected for display but his was not. He said, "It's a joke! Yours got accepted even though I am the one who taught you how to paint?" I replied, "You need to know what I painted. I live close to Boat Quay where there are many charcoal boats. I painted one of these charcoal boats that was transporting cargo. It was the subject matter that was attractive, not the painting itself! How about you? What did you paint?" Nama responded that he had painted something "abstract". I then remarked, "Something abstract? Were you painting for yourself?"

ABOUT LIVE DRAWING & PROCURING MODELS

At the international art schools, human figure drawing was one of the basic subjects. Nama and I acquired this technique in Australia during our years there. But when we came back to Singapore, there were no opportunities to practice it. There was only inanimate object drawing. With the studio that Brother McNally had offered,⁵ we thought we could continue practising this particular art form. But then we faced the problem of getting models in conservative Singapore. In the early days, nobody was familiar with live drawing since no one travelled overseas. I had to refer to art books that were in limited supply. So Nama made a very dramatic move. Since he moved about in the Indian area (i.e., Tekka area) and Beach Road, he often met foreign visitors

and hitch hikers who possessed a very wide range of distinctive complexions. The years that he had spent studying in Australia allowed Nama to pique the interest of these visitors, especially with regard to the westerners. He had the courage and tact to approach and form a connection with these foreigners. Nama would talk to them and convince them to model for him in exchange for a stipend. This was largely due to his approachable and kind nature. Nama was a simple and down to earth person. The demographic profiles of the models underwent changes. At one time they were all Caucasians while during another period, they were Chinese nationals. Nowadays they are local Singaporeans - as our society became more culturally broad minded, this started to occur naturally.

In the year 1989, I joined Nama as a founding member of a group of artists who were seeking to expand their interests in the human figure and live drawing. And because of our respective backgrounds, we were the right people to project an image of live drawing as an art form with the potential to thrive in Singapore. As the group began to grow bigger and attract more participants, there came a point when we felt it was about time we held a public display of our works to project the above-mentioned image. It would also help to recruit others who were interested in joining us and contributing their own creative efforts. In order to prepare for the exhibition, we had to call it by a certain name, and since we were on the cusp of 1990, we decided to call it 'Group 90'. As such, we were the first group in Singapore to successfully organise an art exhibition under that collective name.

INITIATORS OF THE ORIGINAL 'GROUP 90': CHIA WAI HON, S. NAMASIVAYAM, SIM THONG KHERN

The exhibition was highly publicised and we were interviewed by the press. Just prior to that, we were a bit hesitant because of the nudity in our drawings. We were quite unsure since Singapore at that time was still very conservative. Would the public accept us? But then, to our surprise, we were praised in the Chinese press as well as the English language Straits Times. The show opened. There was a lot of coverage about this new trend in art that had

been pioneered by us artists who came with really substantial art backgrounds. We even managed to sell some works, perhaps about six to seven of them. The prices varied from artist to artist, from \$10,000 (Brother McNally), \$9,000 (Liu Kang); while others ranged between \$2,000 and \$6,500. The buyers were a mix of local corporate executives and foreigners.

Q: Why is Group 90 not very well known now?

All the senior people have passed away. But the group is still functioning. A lot of young people continue to produce art under the name of Group 90 and they also hold art exhibitions but they can tend to be rather superficial. We were the first to present a dynamic and respectable public image of a new category of art that had been previously neglected. My suggestion for the future is that there should be an art exhibition of live figure paintings at Gillman Barracks since it is an art center. The people who turn up there are of a completely different class who belong in a league of their own. It is a unique place. Please make sure that what you display there is authentic and original artwork that cannot be produced by just any Tom, Dick or Harry. It must be something that can only be seen there. It must be artwork that can appeal to both young locals as well as foreign visitors. This attention to quality, together with the unique attraction of Gillman Barracks with its leafy location and restaurants, will help promote live figure art in a dignified manner. This will also be in line with the ideals and intentions of the original Group 90.

Q: So was it a happy period for Group 90 at the time?

Yes it was. It was a most impressive and encouraging time. And so far, the group has existed close to 29 years. 1990 was the year when I retired. So I've been retired for 29 years.

THE RELEVANCE OF LIVE FIGURE ART

By right, art schools should have figurative live drawing classes. In the past, they had drawing lessons but not life drawing classes. Life drawing requires quite a different kind of approach. You must have a trainer who has strong abilities. Anyone engaging in life

drawing as an art form has to be well prepared, as a requirement, at a higher level. It is not like object drawing that can be done by anyone. For life drawing, there must be a clearer outlook about what art itself is supposed to be. A student would have to be exposed to the history of art forms so as to become familiar with the different periods in artistic development, as well as the various artistic styles that have been used. Singapore, in order to raise the existing level of artistic development and aesthetic appreciation, should make basic life drawing a major part of the art curriculum at a secondary school level. Nowadays, secondary schools are able to talk openly about sex education so as to ensure that young people cannot be misled. This shows that our society has become more open minded. So, why has this particular art form been put aside? There should be an opportunity for it to be on public display at prominent places for the benefit of people who are intimately engaged in the discussion and appreciation of art; in order to create publicity, as well as to raise a dialogue about this particular art form.

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF NAMA'S ARTISTIC LEGACY

By right, the preservation of Nama's legacy is something that the Singapore government should undertake since he was also part of a minority race. There was and still is nobody with an art background like his. He spent all his years just specialising in one particular art form. Even during the later part of his life, he would rarely paint landscapes. He would concentrate on painting figures. He would undertake some drawings on a large scale by using a big scale broad brush. If you stand back and look, they would have a dynamic effect. He didn't draw outlines or shapes but would do a combination of comparative parts to form the complete whole. Since he was able to apply tonal values as well as different qualities of light, shapes and forms, each piece seemed to be moving at the end of the exercise. This could only come from a man with a different outlook about what art and life should be like, and his ability to work on a form over time made it very valuable. That is why the end product becomes more transient and yet more permanent simultaneously. If only Nama's work could be made to last and be conserved over the long term.

1. **Brother Joseph McNally**

Born in 1923, he was an Irish ecclesiast from the De La Sale Brothers who spent a significant portion of his life as an influential educator in post-war British Malaya and later, independent Malaysia and Singapore. After holding positions as a teacher and principal in various prominent schools across both sides of the causeway, he settled permanently in Singapore in 1973, before retiring as the principal of St Patrick's School in 1983. Trained at Dublin's Irish National College of Art (1951-1954) and New York's Columbia University (Master's in Art and Education, 1969 / Doctorate in Education, 1972), Brother McNally was well poised to promote the arts in Singapore. Unfortunately, he functioned in an era when officialdom in Singapore gave the arts a very low priority. Nevertheless, he strove on undaunted. Through sheer unshakeable zeal, the ever polite and diplomatic McNally became the founder of St Patricks Arts Centre, which later evolved into today's LASALLE College of the Arts. His undying passion and advocacy of the arts was recognised through the many awards he received in his lifetime, and the naming of a road in his honour right before his crowning gift to Singapore: LASALLE College of the Arts. He passed away in Ireland in 2002.

2. **Colombo Plan Scholarship**

Born out of the Commonwealth Conference of Foreign Ministers held in Colombo, Sri Lanka in 1950, the prestigious scholarship was established to help promote educational standards and the acquisition of specialised technical skills among member countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Originally conceived to last for only six years, it was subsequently extended periodically to the point where it still exists today. Over the years, the list of Colombo Plan Scholarship recipients has grown to include many prominent personalities who went on to make outstanding contributions in their respective countries, in various fields of scholarship and endeavour.

3. **Suri bin Mohyani**

One of the co-founders of the Singapore Art Society in October 1949, he learnt to paint in 1935 under the tutelage of Richard Walker, the first Art Superintendent of Singapore schools. Mohyani was well known for his watercolours of rustic kampong life and scenery in the 1940s and 50s. Prior to his trip to Sydney with Mr Sim Thong Khern and Mr S. Namasivayam, he had been to London to partake in an exhibition in 1955, funded by Ho Kok Ho, then president of the Singapore Art Society, along with other Singaporean artists such as Cheong Soo Peng, a pioneer in the Nanyang art style. Today, some of Mohyani's works are to be found amongst the National Gallery's collection.

4. **LASALLE College of the Arts**

Founded in 1984 by Brother Joseph McNally, it was originally known as the St. Patricks Arts Centre and was funded largely through his own pocket, given the low priority the government placed on the arts at that time. Despite the early years of hardship and neglect from officialdom, the college grew from strength to strength over the years, led by the dogged determination and unshakeable zeal of Brother McNally. S. Namasivayam was among the pioneer artist-educators who were invited by Brother McNally to lecture at the college. Today, LASALLE College of the Arts, with its modern art premises and facilities, has been transformed into a prestigious and well-established fixture on the vibrant arts-education scene in Singapore.

5. **Studio**

This was located initially at the old LASALLE campus at the Goodman Arts Centre, off Mountbatten Road, and later at the new campus at 1 McNally Street.

Nama: A Daughter's Perspective

Sentha Wouterlood

Who was Nama? What sort of man was he? Ask people who had known him, and they might say that he was a gifted artist, a kind mentor, an engaging but sometimes demanding teacher, perhaps a friend, a colleague, or an eccentric gentleman whose precise speech and manners were a throwback to colonial times. My response is to share a little here of Nama's complex makeup, and how he influenced my own pathways through education, career and self discovery.

What I share here is the Nama I knew at home, just part of the man whom I will always remember most as "Dad". It is now some years since his passing. I travel back through the floodgate of memories ... The image of one afternoon in the early seventies emerges. It was a weekend and I wasn't at school. Dad was seated on a couch in the living room with a thick book in his hand. His attention was fixed on a beautiful sepia coloured drawing. He tapped at it excitedly as I drew closer and remarked,

"Vitruvian Man' by Leonardo Da Vinci. Remarkable work. What a genius! He was the ideal 'Renaissance Man'. Do you know what that means?"

I had no idea and tried to mumble something. He shook a dismissive finger and explained that a "Renaissance Man" pursued diverse areas of study and interests. And that "Vitruvian Man" (the famous picture of a man within a circle and a square) demonstrated Da Vinci's unique ability to combine in a single work ideas from many fields - art, science, architecture, anatomy and philosophy. This emphasis on the integration of a broad range of topics and ideas was a major part of Dad's approach to Art and Education. He read widely and voraciously. Our home library was filled with books on numerous subjects which we were encouraged to study and enjoy. He liked memory games, crosswords and other exercises in "brain plasticity" to find correspondences between different disciplines. He studied art plates in books meticulously. For example, he commented how subjects in Seurat's and Manet's works shimmered as particles of light and colour illuminated them. Books on colour theories and optics were added to the shelves. He started drawing with conte crayons, adapting Seurat's methods to his personal style. He took us to the National Gallery on Stamford Road, which in those days held local and regional art collections.

Photography was another avid interest. His lenses, Olympus and Leica cameras were carefully protected inside glass dessicators, filled at the base with anhydrous copper sulphate or silica gel crystals. Along with sketchbooks, his photographs became source materials for paintings. He loved walking

through the Singapore Botanic Gardens. He would snap away at black swans gliding across the lake, squirrels climbing trees, children playing, and any scene that captivated him. Later in his studio, he would clip a photograph or two to the easel and work with them for a while. Then he would turn to sketches he had drawn of the same subjects. He searched tirelessly for ways to synthesise different points of view into a finished work. His endless curiosity transformed the "ordinariness" of everyday subjects. Outside the Orchard MRT Station, and almost hidden by the rush hour crowds, a cobbler sat mending shoes on the pavement. Dad paused and watched with intensity the man's gnarled hands, his bent figure, and the tins of glue and boot polish at his feet. Another quick sketch sprang up in the pocketbook he always carried. No longer a mere blot in the crowd, that old man was immortalised.

Dad had a sharp eye for details and moods. One day, in the "Tropical Jungle" section of the Botanic Gardens, he stopped walking suddenly, and motioned me to stay quiet. He pointed to a tree branch a few metres above. All I could see was dappled light filtering through the leaves, adding pretty splashes of green against tree trunks. Dad was standing perfectly still. He kept looking. I tried to breathe without making a sound. Then, miraculously, a single branch began to move. Slowly, parts of it turned a bright green, then yellow, then red ... Scaly legs appeared, and bulging eyes that stared ahead. A chameleon! Our eyes were riveted by the creature, its skin changing colours as a quick gust of wind ruffled leaves and cicadas buzzed noisily some distance away. The quiet bush had become a live painting, complete with vivid colours, sounds and movement.

"How amazing nature is", said Dad. "How amazing that this animal so well hidden minutes ago is now visible."

This theme of inextricable links connecting all elements in nature was explored time and again. From early artworks (Fig. 1) to later ones (Fig. 2), Dad's figurative art shows human beings as part of a larger cosmology. Sometimes, he felt frustrated by his attempts to depict this. He would seek a solution. On one such occasion, I found him reading side by side, the illustrated poems of William Blake and Kahlil Gibran. Both men he said, had used symbolism to striking effect in their art. The results made their human figures appear illusory, and at the same time, transcendent. He put the books down, nodded to himself and went back to the studio with fresh enthusiasm. Every day, Dad made an entry in his journal. This was also the habit of Somerset Maugham, a writer he was fond of. His Penguin edition of "A Writer's Notebook", Maugham's diary, was read often over the years. I asked him how he had learnt to be so conscientious



Fig. 1: Nama '64, Oil on canvas, 1964



Fig. 2: Cosmic Balance, Acrylic and gouache on canvas, 1994

in his work practices and routines. Years ago, he said, a wartime friend had given him a booklet on "The Eight Fold Path", a key Buddhist teaching on rightful practices in life. Since then, he had followed principles of ethical behaviour, self discipline and diligence in his daily life.

Until knee problems prevented him in his fifties, Dad began his day before six a.m. with a series of "star jumps" and a thirty minute jog. They were replaced later with callisthenic exercises and wrist stretches, which he did into his eighties. His most persistent health complaint however, was migraines. He slept poorly. I sometimes heard him from my room next door, shouting and groaning when wartime horrors reappeared in his sleep. Quietly, I would tiptoe down to the basement studio and find him looking at the blank canvas in front of him. He worked in silent concentration. In a short while, the drawing activity calmed him, and the brows that were furrowed deeply in pain would relax. Dad's inner world was active ... So much awe and

fascination would pass over his face and through his taut, wiry frame as he walked through a naturescape, listened to music or studied a praying mantis on the windowsill for a full five minutes before it hopped away. He internalised ideas, music, sound, gestures, figures in stasis and motion, and recorded them industriously in notebooks.

Walking through the parklands at Upper Peirce Reservoir, he would smile in delight at the sound of birds chirping - singly at first, and then, in unison. "The Pastoral' - cadenza, second movement!" he would exclaim, recalling the woodwind instruments imitating birdsong in Beethoven's Sixth Symphony. It was one of his favourite pieces of music, created by a composer who like Dad, had found long walks in nature inspiring and healing. The joy of such walks produced some of Dad's most colourful works (Fig. 3 & 4). At home, he loved listening to classical music, weaving patterns through the air with his arms while he conducted imaginary orchestras. When he heard melancholic passages by Elgar and Tchaikovsky, he grew still and sat with eyes closed. Afterwards, he carried the emotional registers stirred by music into an artwork in progress. Upon the canvas, those



Fig. 3: Nama '91, Gouache on canvas, 1991



Fig. 4: Flowers in a Vase, Oil pastel and pastel on paper, 1991

collective emotions would find a meaningful release. Through his very presence, Dad's instruction was to look closely at the world around us, feel our responses to it, and find ways to express them. He faced social and cultural attitudes at the time which often imposed physical and psychological barriers upon a liberal minded artist. Sheet dimensions and picture frames were analogous to those restrictions, yet Dad's explosive expressions of the need for freedom are evident in his portrayal of figures. Each figure appears ready to move proudly, in an unconfined, natural body.

Dad understood breathing and musculature, breathing and movement, the complex mechanisms which govern them, and how they relate to one another. His figurative works are imbued with an acute sense of anatomical connections and their dynamic inner energies. This same processing is required for healthy movement, whether in sport, dance, walking or repose. Watching Dad at work allowed me to see the infinite possibilities of moving and expressing one's self in unframed spaces through dance and movement, which I chose to study. His example encouraged me to research my own areas of interest within different cultures and philosophical traditions - ancient, native, contemporary, traditional or non conformist - and to never stop learning.



Fig. 5: Nama 3, Pastel on paper, 2000

He strove to learn more about the Natural world and Art so he could better understand the essentials of each, and their interconnections (Fig. 5). This investigation was developed further in later works, with their pared down ink and brush strokes, and minimal use of colour. He spoke of his admiration for traditional Chinese painting, and the principles of harmony between Man and the Universe which Taoism's "Yin Yang" symbol represented. He adopted ideas from a painting method he was not trained in and reinterpreted its timeless philosophy in his own style. Black or a few colours were set against white to suggest the balance of dualities in life. He explained, "I want to make things simpler, with less noise and clutter in the work." The ink medium was dense, and harder to control for an artist

more accustomed to paint. It was a challenge to draw and maintain fluid lines, but he persevered (Fig. 6 & 7).



Fig. 6: Untitled, Ink on paper, undated



Fig. 7: Nama '04, Ink on paper, 2004

When we cultivate an open mind, generous humanity, balanced perception and an unconfined sense of wonderment, we will find many resources to support our quest. We can deepen our understanding of a chosen field, and create a more integrated, purposeful existence whatever challenges may come our way. I learned the wisdom of this from my father, Nama.

During one of my last visits, he expressed a wish that his life's work be used to help shape and encourage future generations. To this end, he wrote in a final entry a message of hope, so they might also discover as he had, that beyond tools, techniques and even teachers, "ART IS THE ESSENCE OF LIFE."

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My heartfelt thanks to Nama's friends at Group 90. They gave him the encouragement to delve deeply into his life's passion against numerous odds. I am grateful to the following:

The late Brother Joseph McNally who helped Nama to ignite the study and expression of figurative art with Group 90 and later, at Lasalle College of the Arts.

The late Mr Chia Wai Hon, his close friend and teaching colleague of many years, and Group 90 co-founder.

Mr Loh Khee Yew, former Dean of the Design Faculty at Lasalle College of the Arts and firm supporter of Group 90.

Mr Sim Thong Khern, Group 90 co-founder and accounts manager. He provided warm and unwavering friendship to Nama from their Colombo Plan student years until his final days.

Dr M. Fikret Ercan, Group 90 member and Senior Lecturer at the School of Electrical and Electronic Engineering, Singapore Polytechnic. He photographed and catalogued many of Nama's artworks while they shared inspiring conversations about art, life and the art of living.

Mr Sam Kumar, Group 90 member, film maker, photographer and artist. His cheerful disposition and optimism relieved Nama immensely during challenging times.

The late Mr K.P. Bhaskar, founder of Nrityalaya Aesthetics Society and the Bhaskar's Arts Academy. He helped to organise Group 90's first public exhibition FIGURAMA, and provided gallery space and publicity for several subsequent solo and Group 90 joint exhibitions.

Family members of the late R. Narayanasamy – Nama's friend from youth, for caretaking delicate artworks and sharing years of generosity and friendship.

The Bollings, the Weekleys and the Cuthbertsons of N.S.W. Australia – 3 generations of the same family. They were Nama's first landlords in 1950s Sydney, his lifelong friends, and have remained collectors and fans of his work.

Ms Audrey Yeo of Yeo Workshop and her team. Her perceptive eye and diligence is helping to make Nama's artworks visible, fresh and alive for a contemporary audience.

All those who have put time, energy and expense into this project.

Special thanks and gratitude to our late mother, Madam N. Lakshmi. Her quiet support at home over the years gave Nama the confidence and fuel to keep working in his challenging field. She believed in his vision, personal integrity and talent. That mattered most to Nama until the very end.

BIOGRAPHY

Sentha Wouterlood was born in Sydney, Australia and grew up in Singapore. After her studies at Raffles Girls' School, she obtained a teaching diploma from I.E. (Institute of Education), and qualified as an English, Dance and Drama teacher.

Her graduate studies were in Theatre and Comparative Literature at Murdoch University, Australia. The liberal and interdisciplinary approaches to education that she encountered there developed her appetite for a broader range of subjects. She explored this through post-graduate studies in Dance Movement Therapy (International Dance Therapy Institute, Australia), Craniosacral Therapy and Allied Health Care (East West College of the Healing Arts, USA), and Instructor courses in Yoga and Indonesian Dance. Sentha's studies and travel-work experiences deepened her interest in holistic therapies and how to use them for stress management, and in healing psychosomatic and nervous system issues.

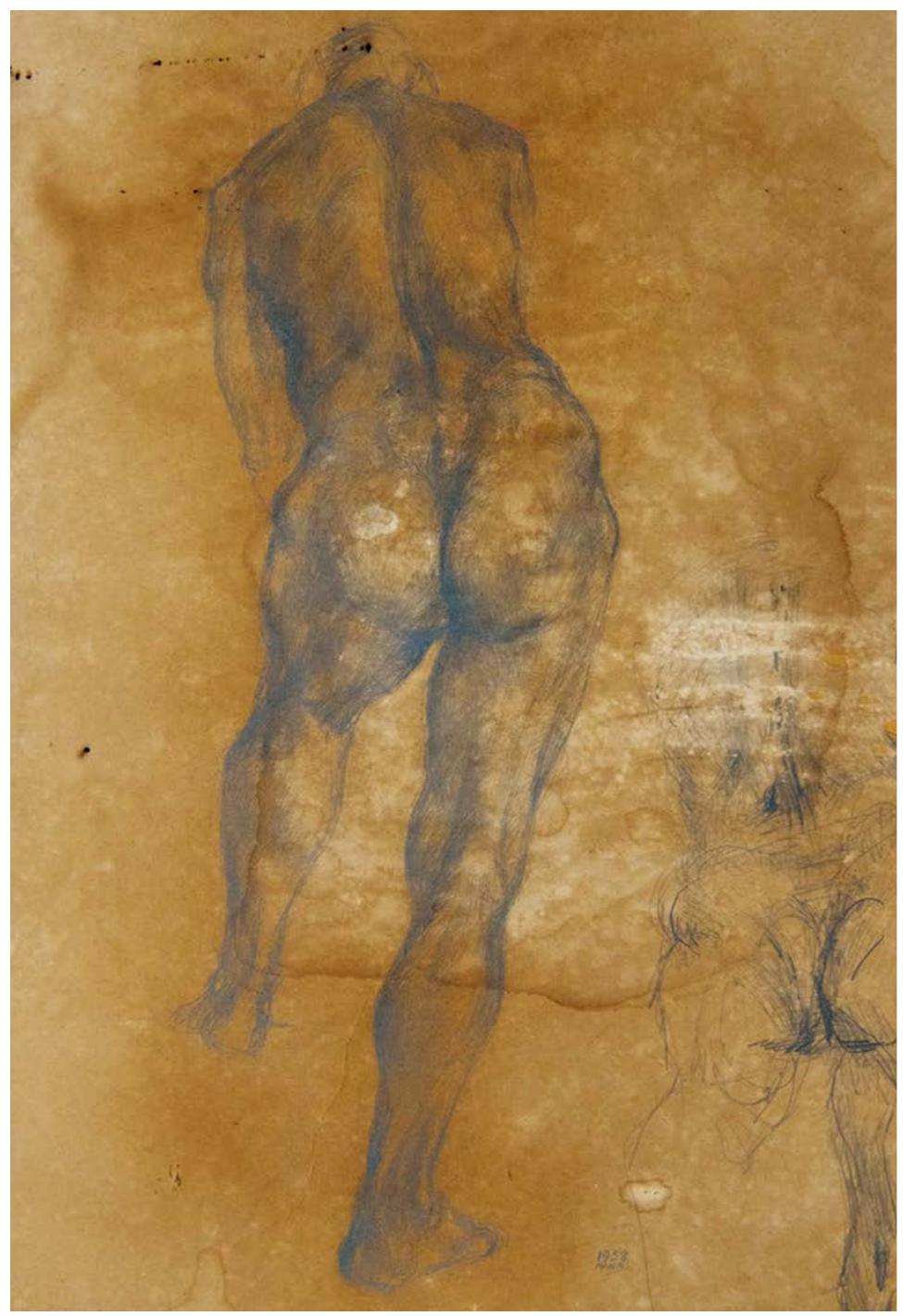
She taught English, Dance and Yoga at secondary schools and colleges in Australia and Indonesia, and freelanced as a vegetarian chef, outback desert tours yoga teacher, dance & multimedia performer and choreographer.

In 2000, Sentha entered a new career as Health and Detox Spa manager, with accompanying practices as a Yoga and Meditation teacher, Dance Therapist and Transpersonal Counsellor.

She currently divides her time between Australia and Southeast Asia and is co-director at a boutique holistic health resort in Northern Thailand.

“DRAWING THE FIGURE DEPENDS ON INTELLIGENT OBSERVATION AND ON ABILITY TO TRANSLATE THIS OBSERVATION INTO TWO DIMENSIONAL FORM. PERCEIVE WHAT IS HAPPENING, NOT WHY IT IS HAPPENING.”

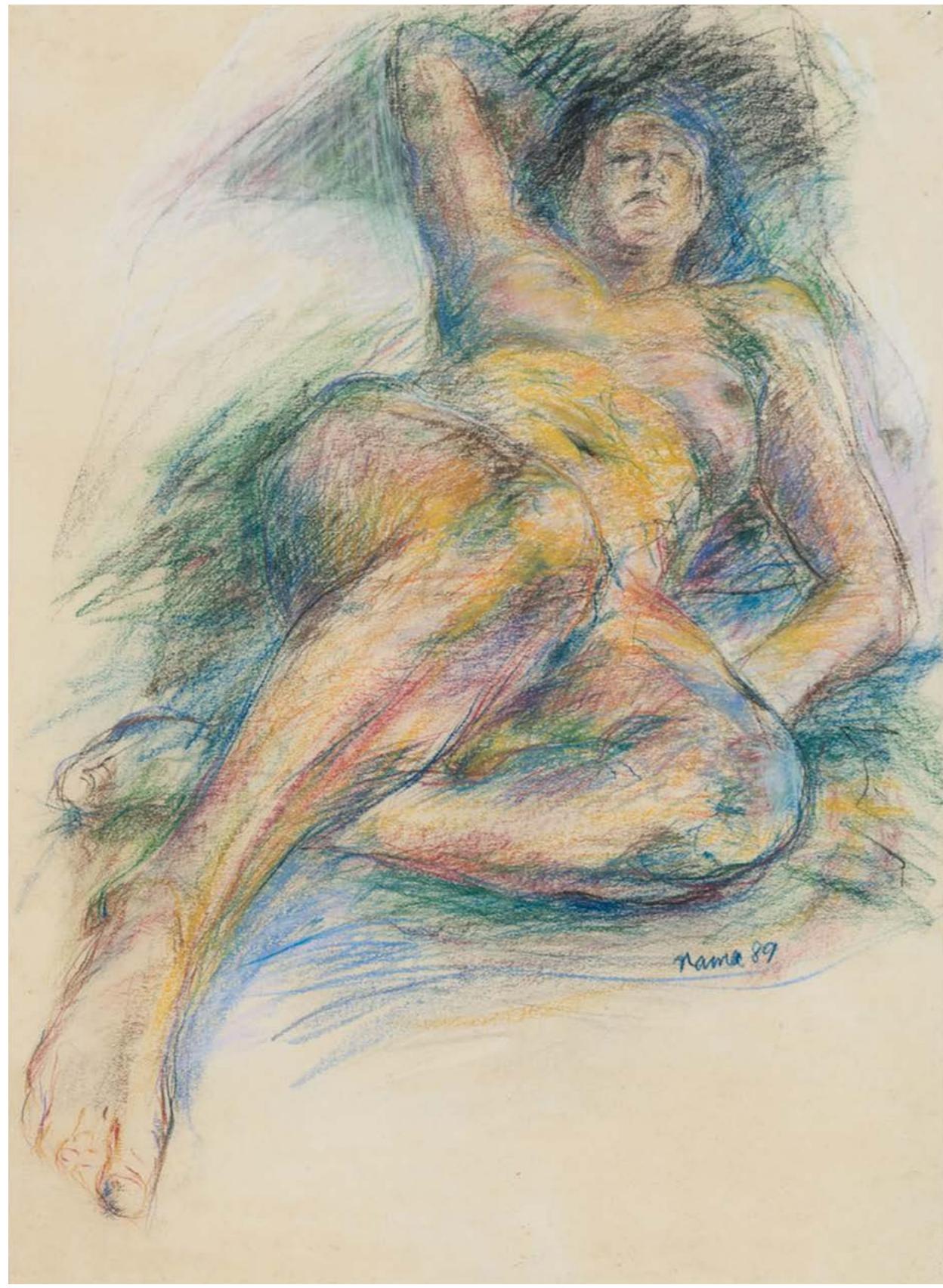
Artworks



Untitled, 1958. Graphite on paper, 62 x 47 cm



Nama '64, 1964. Oil on canvas, 75 x 102 cm



Nama '90, 1990. Charcoal on paper, 70 x 51 cm

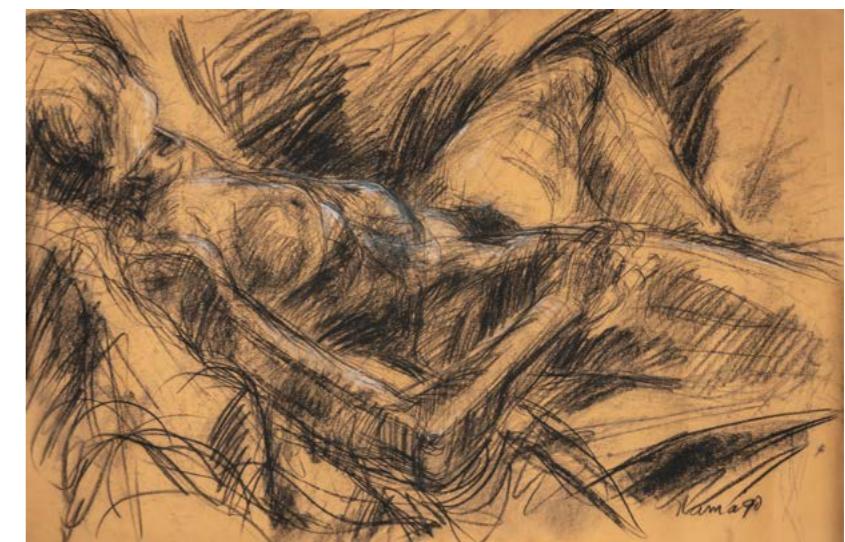




Nama '90, 1990. Pastel on paper, 63.5 x 49 cm



Top Nama '90, 1990. Charcoal on paper, 54 x 75 cm
Bottom Nama '90, 1990. Charcoal and pastel on paper, 52 x 75.5 cm





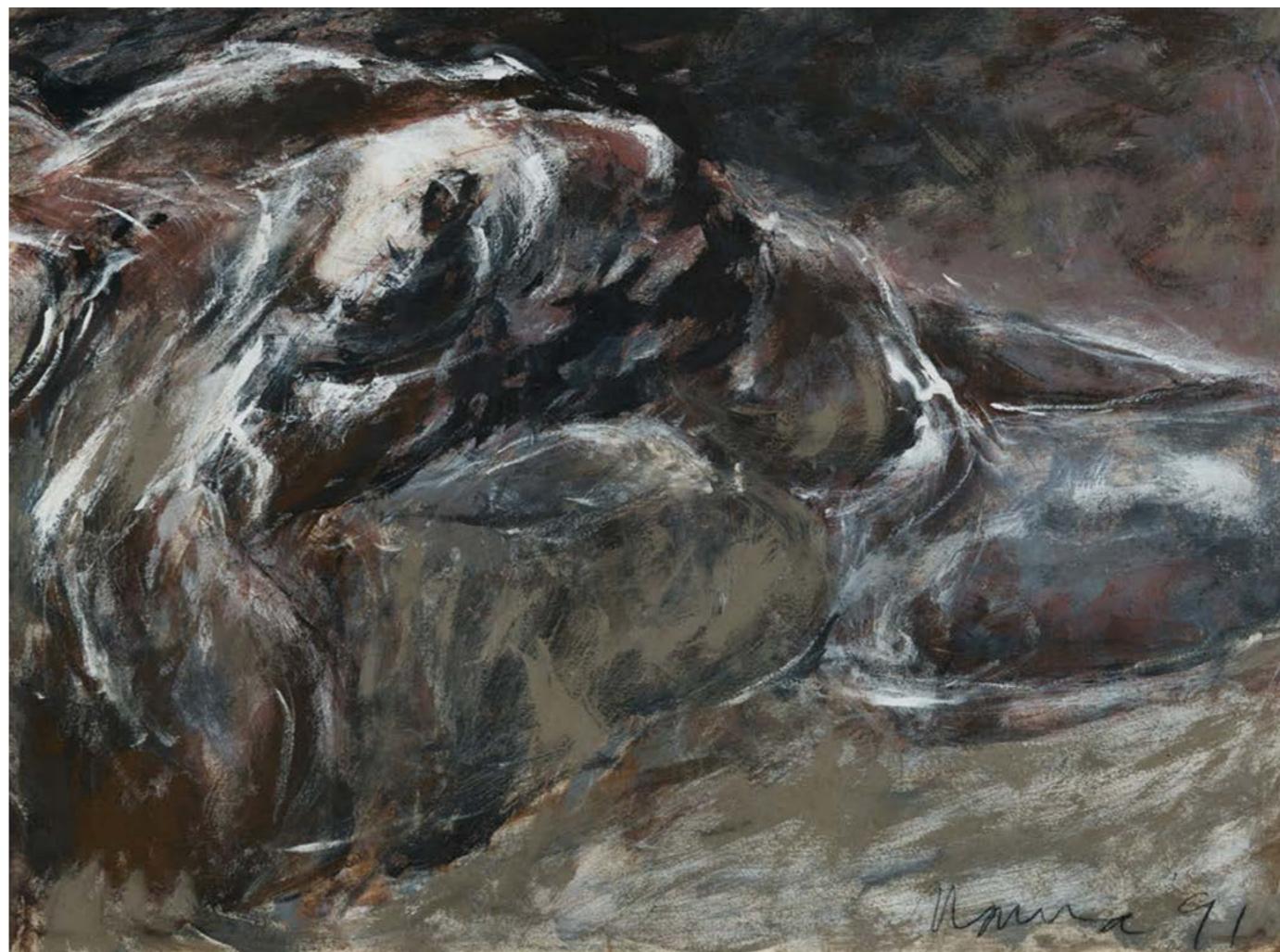
Nama '90, 1990. Charcoal on paper, 75 x 56 cm

Nama '90, 1990. Gouache on canvas, 86 x 67 cm

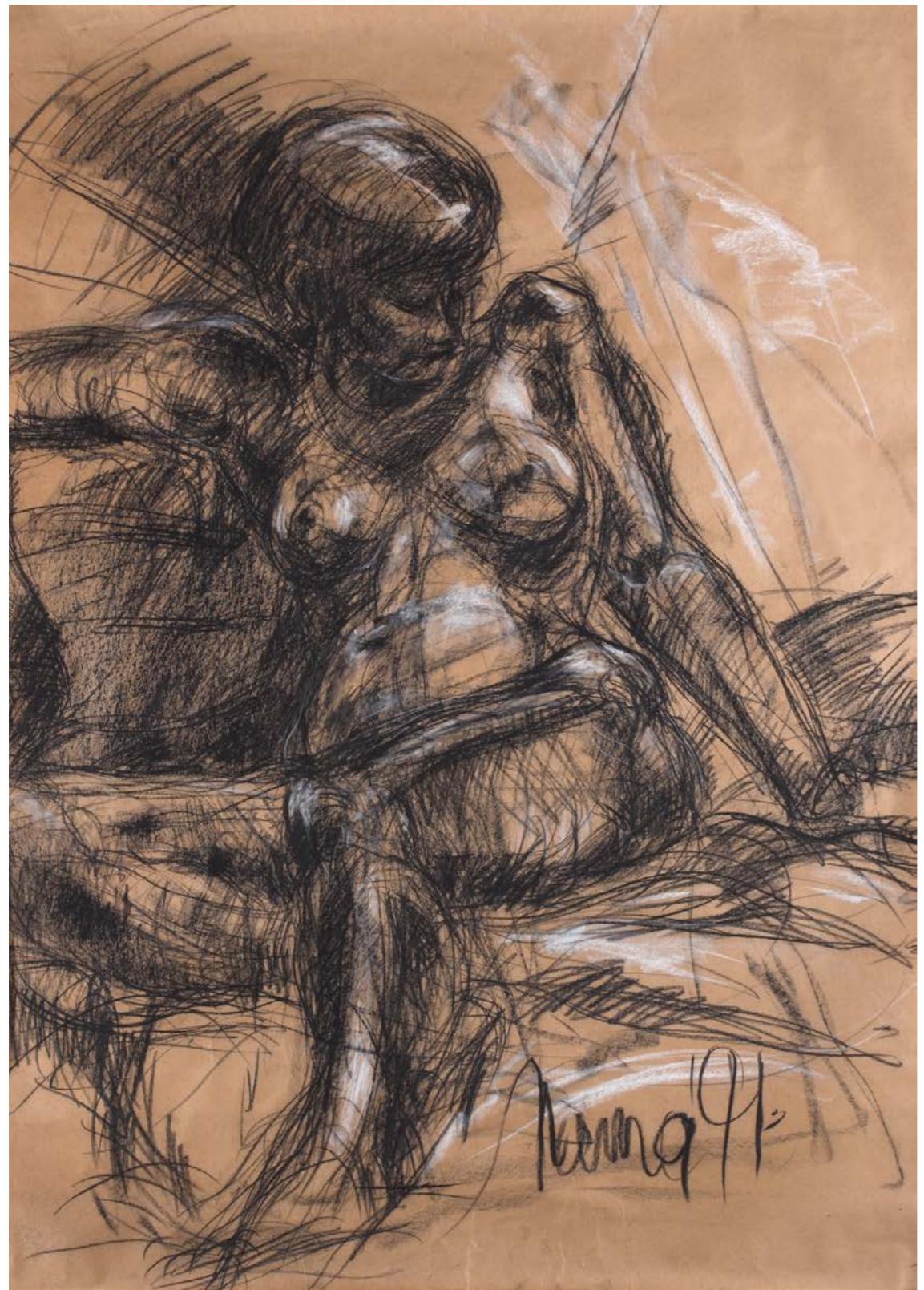




Nama '90, 1990. Pastel on paper, 94 x 73 cm (Framed)

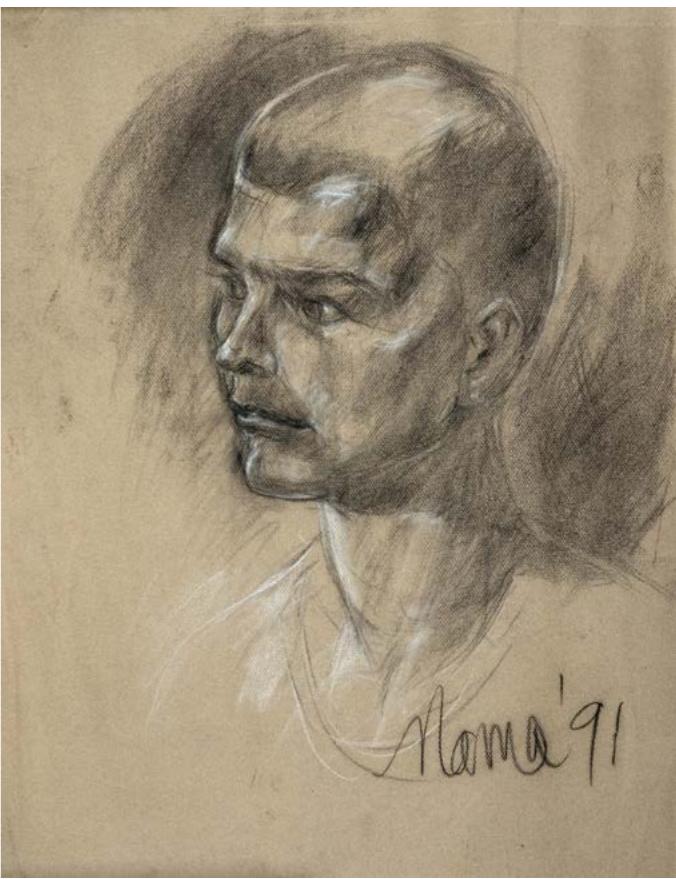


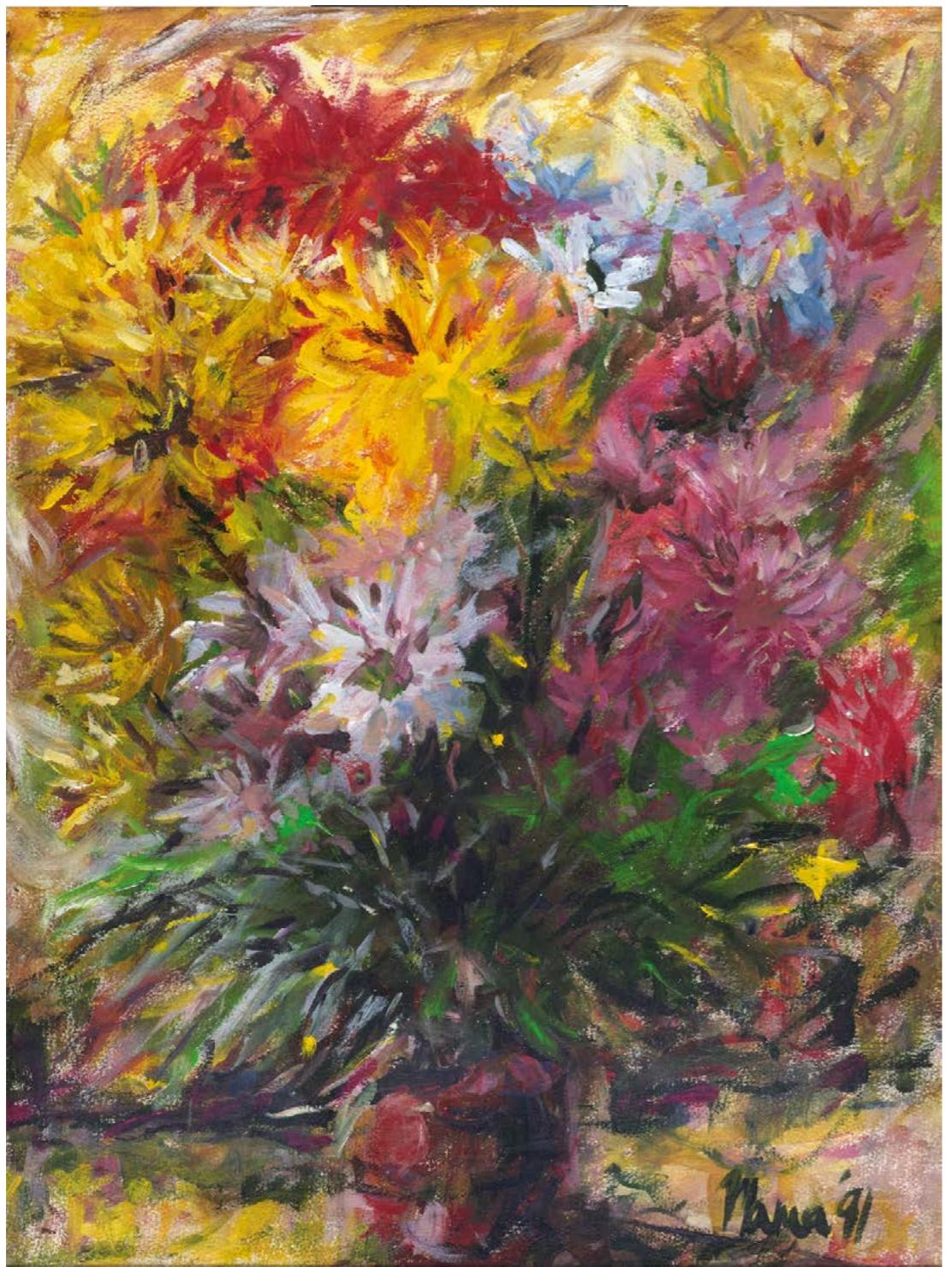
Nama '91, 1991, Gouache on paper, 78 x 96 cm (Framed)



Nama '91, 1991. Charcoal and pastel on paper, 120 x 89 cm

Top *Nama '91*, 1991. Charcoal and pastel on paper, 65 x 49 cm
Bottom *Flowers in a Vase*, 1991. Oil pastel and pastel on paper, 50 x 65 cm

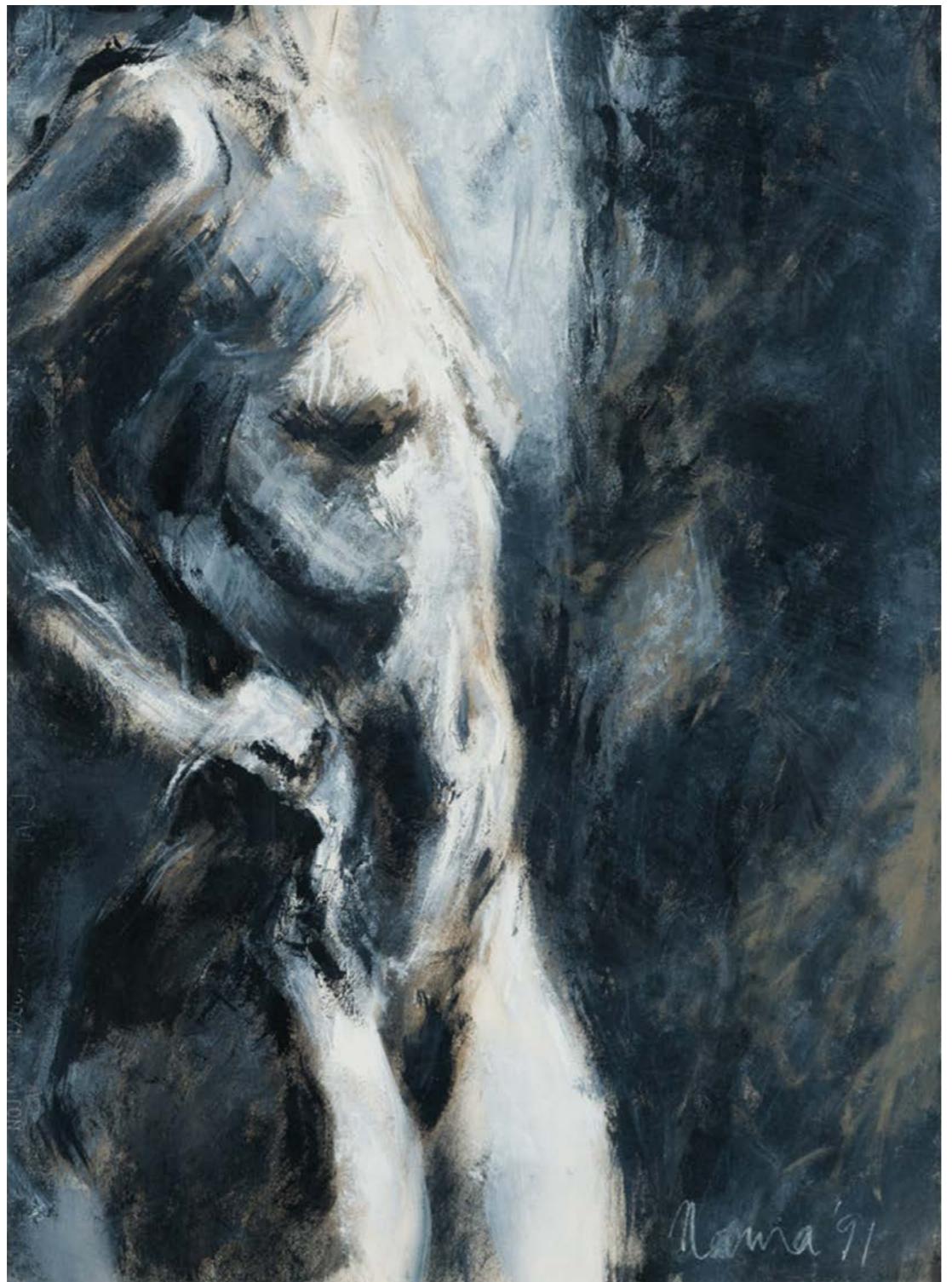




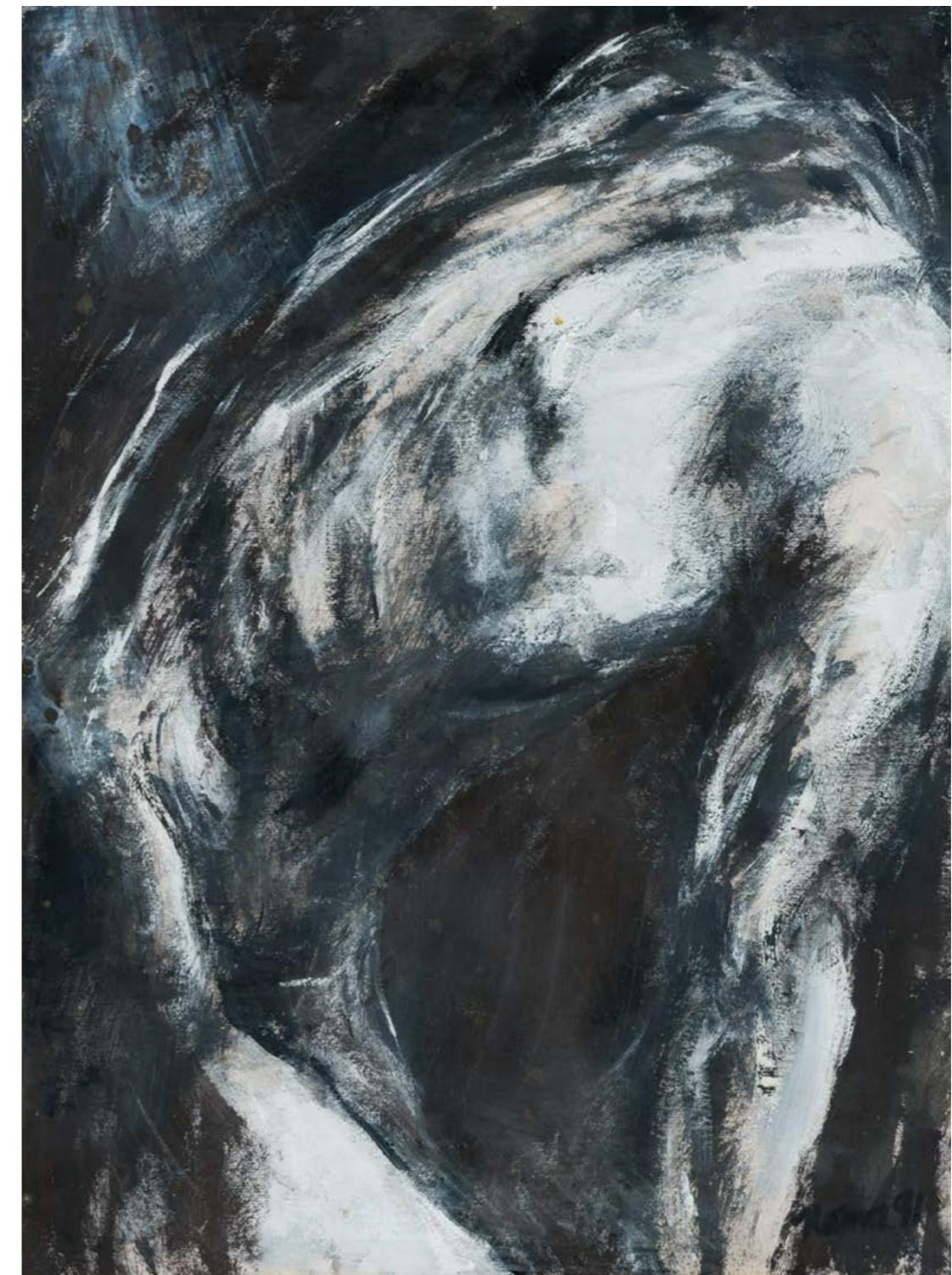
Nama '91, 1991. Gouache on canvas, 93 x 73 cm



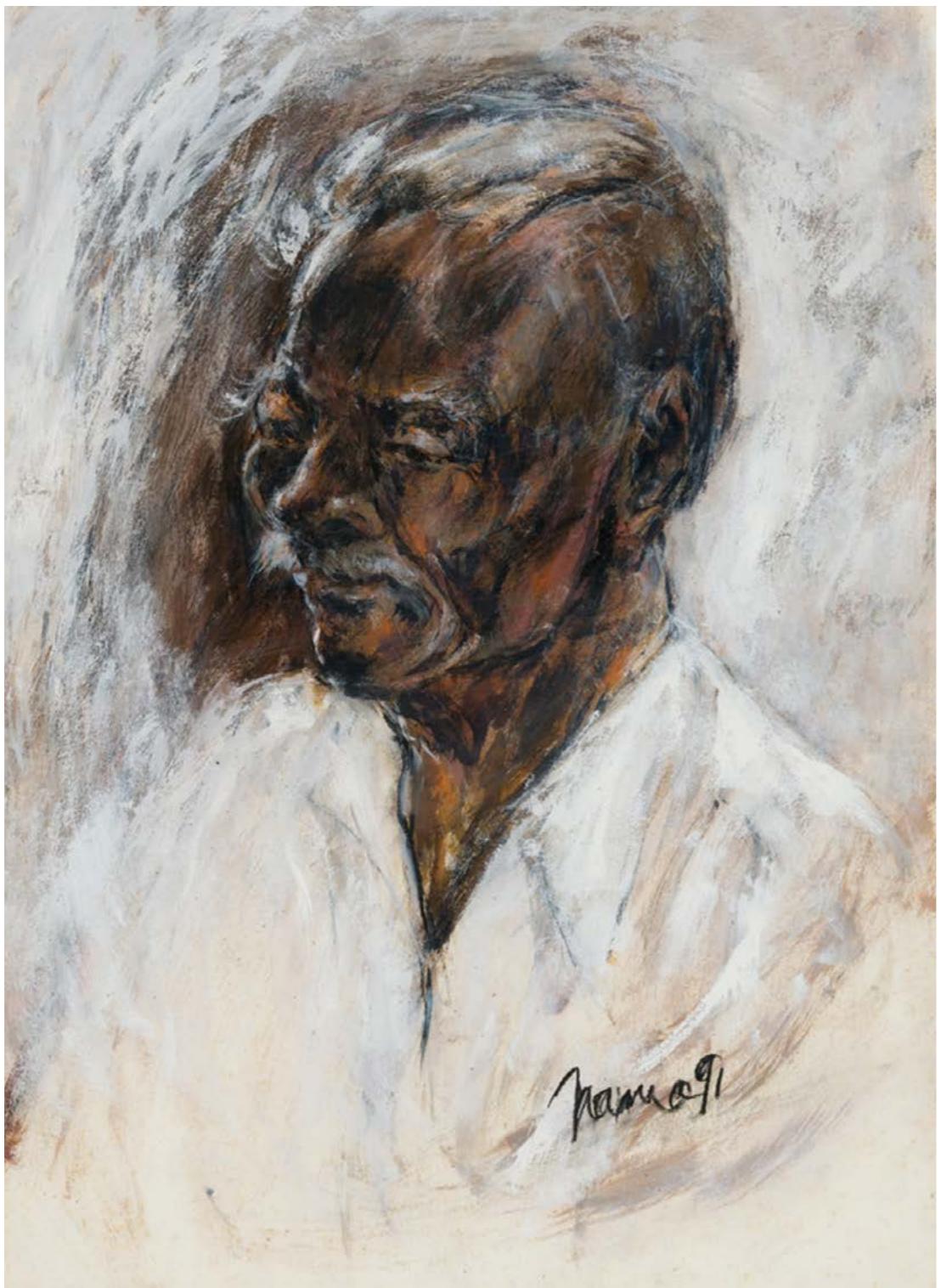
Nama '91, 1991. Pastel on paper, 72 x 51 cm



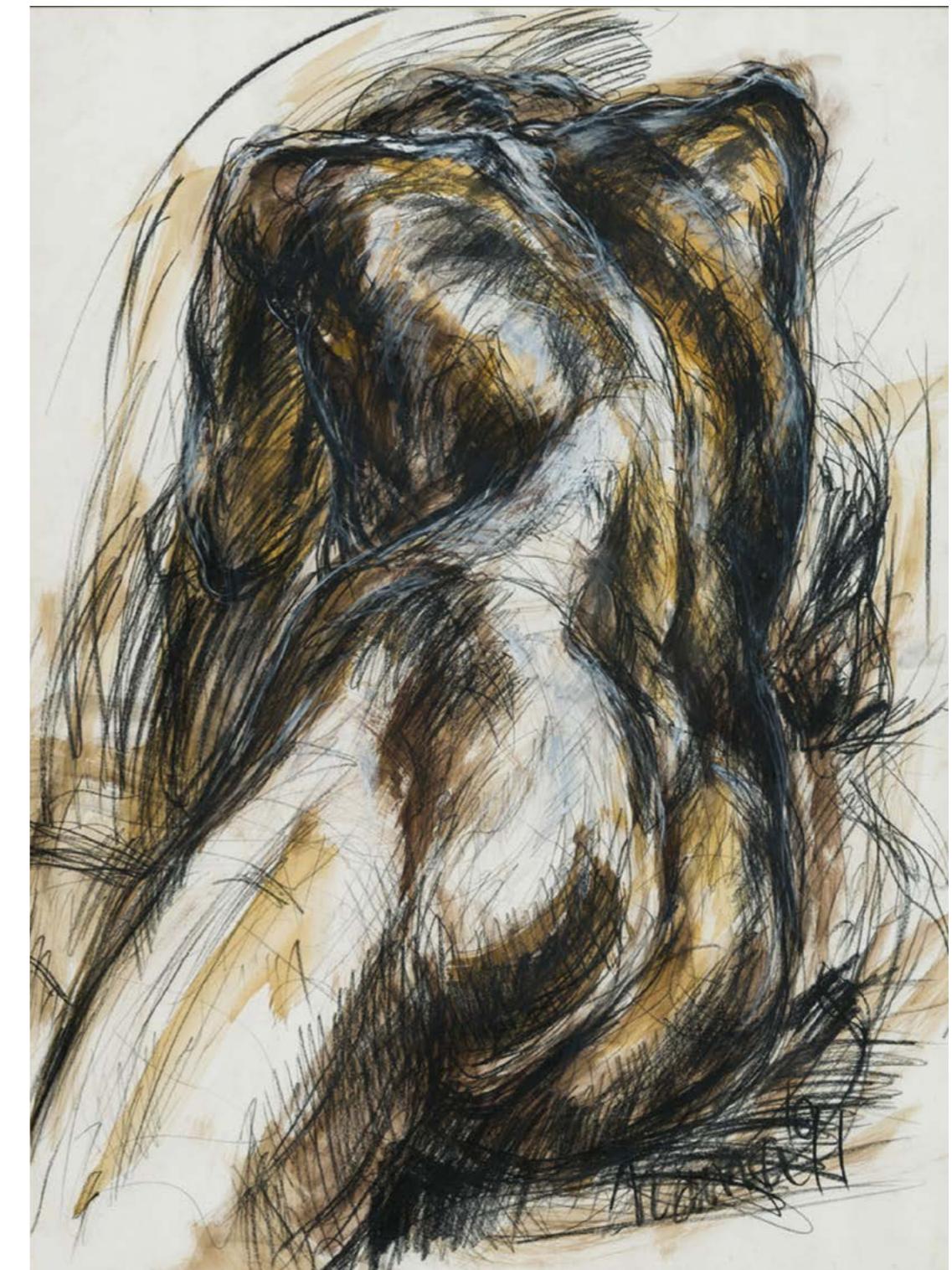
Black & White Nude, 1991. Gouache on paper, 74 x 54.5 cm



Nama '91, 1991. Gouache on paper, 74 x 54.5 cm



Senior Citizen, 1991. Acrylic and chalk on paper, 76 x 54 cm

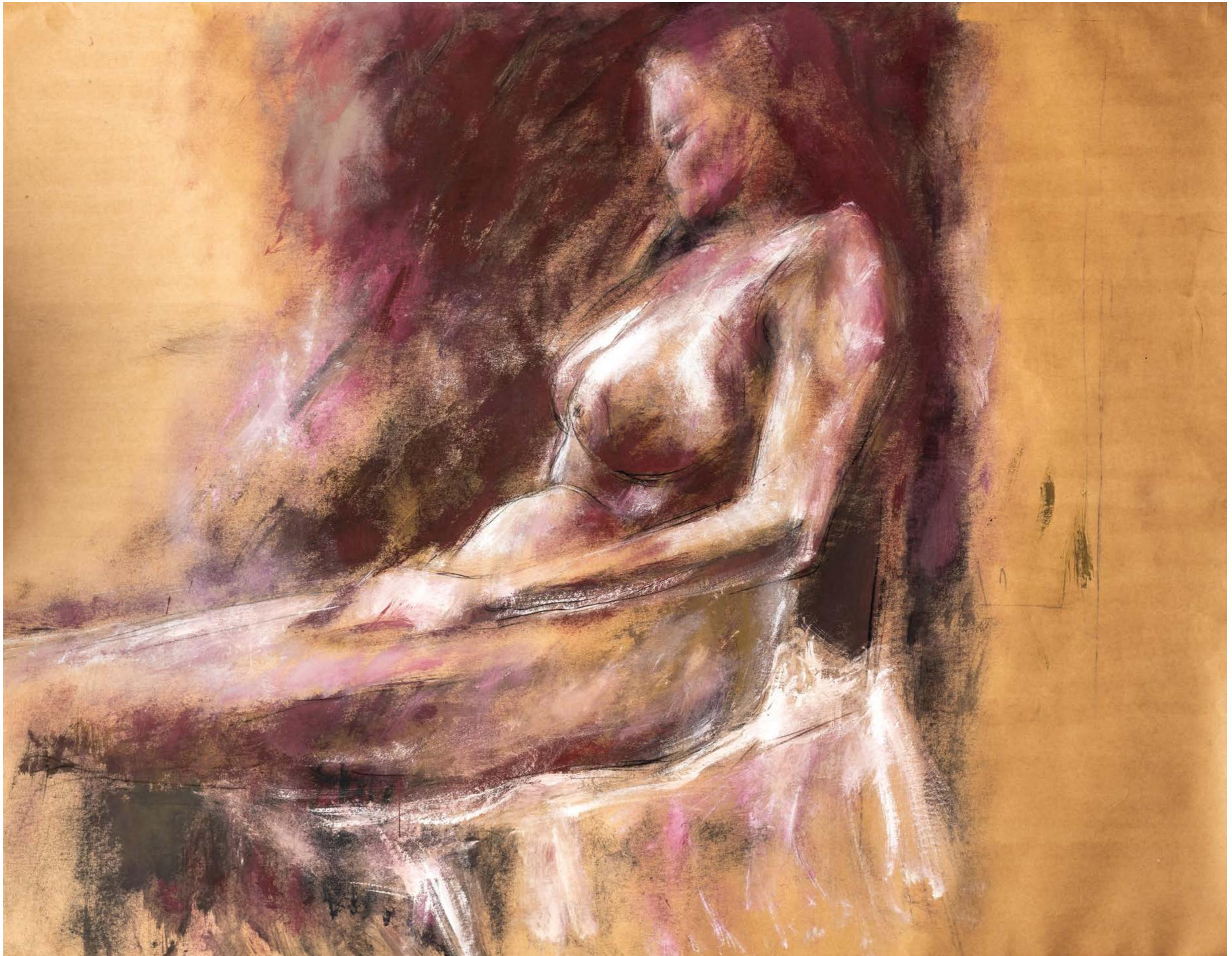


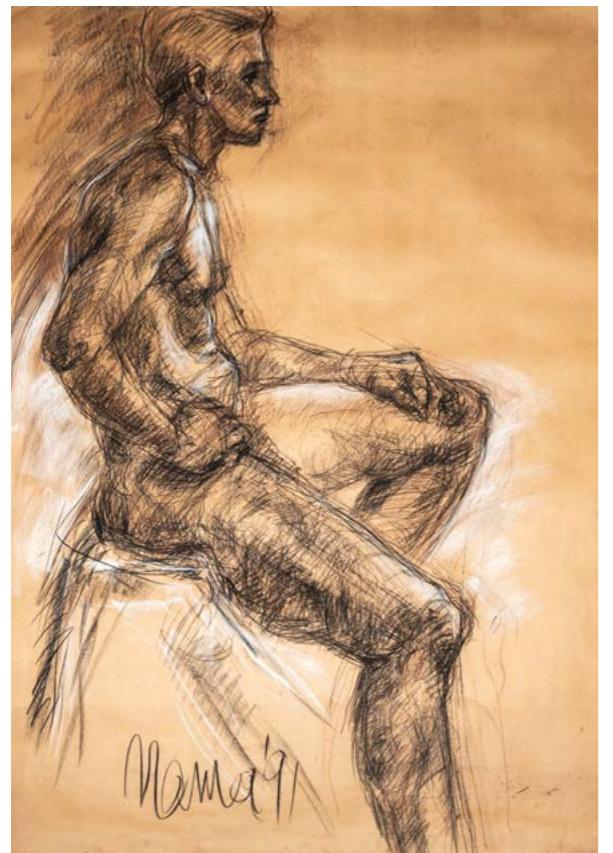
Nama '91, 1991. Ink and pastel on paper, 74 x 55 cm

Reclining Nude, 1991. Charcoal and chalk on paper, 89 x 120 cm



Seated Female Nude Gouache Painting and Charcoal Definition October 1991, 1991. Gouache and charcoal on paper, 89 x 119 cm

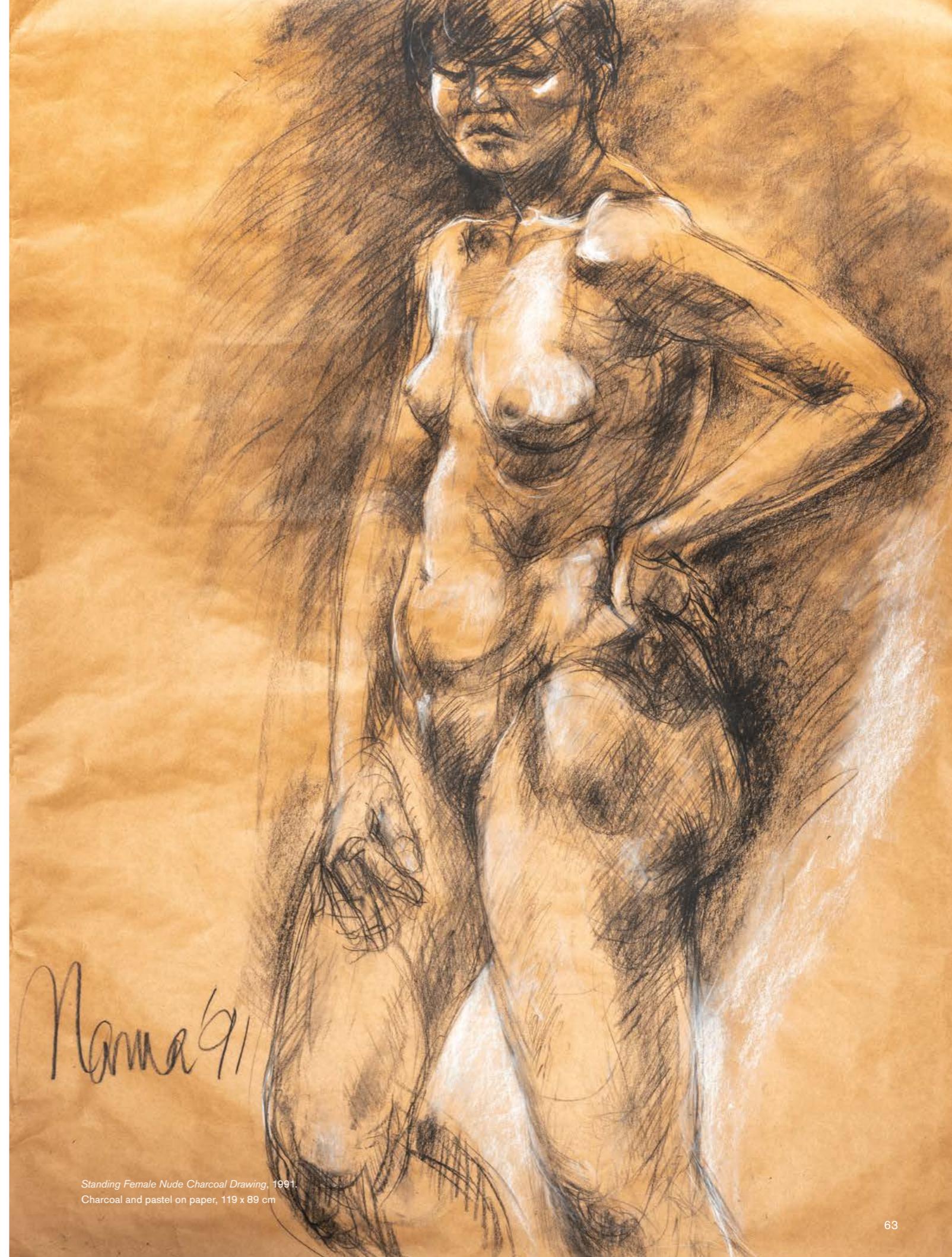




Seated Clothed Figure Female Charcoal, 1991.
Charcoal on paper, 119 x 89 cm

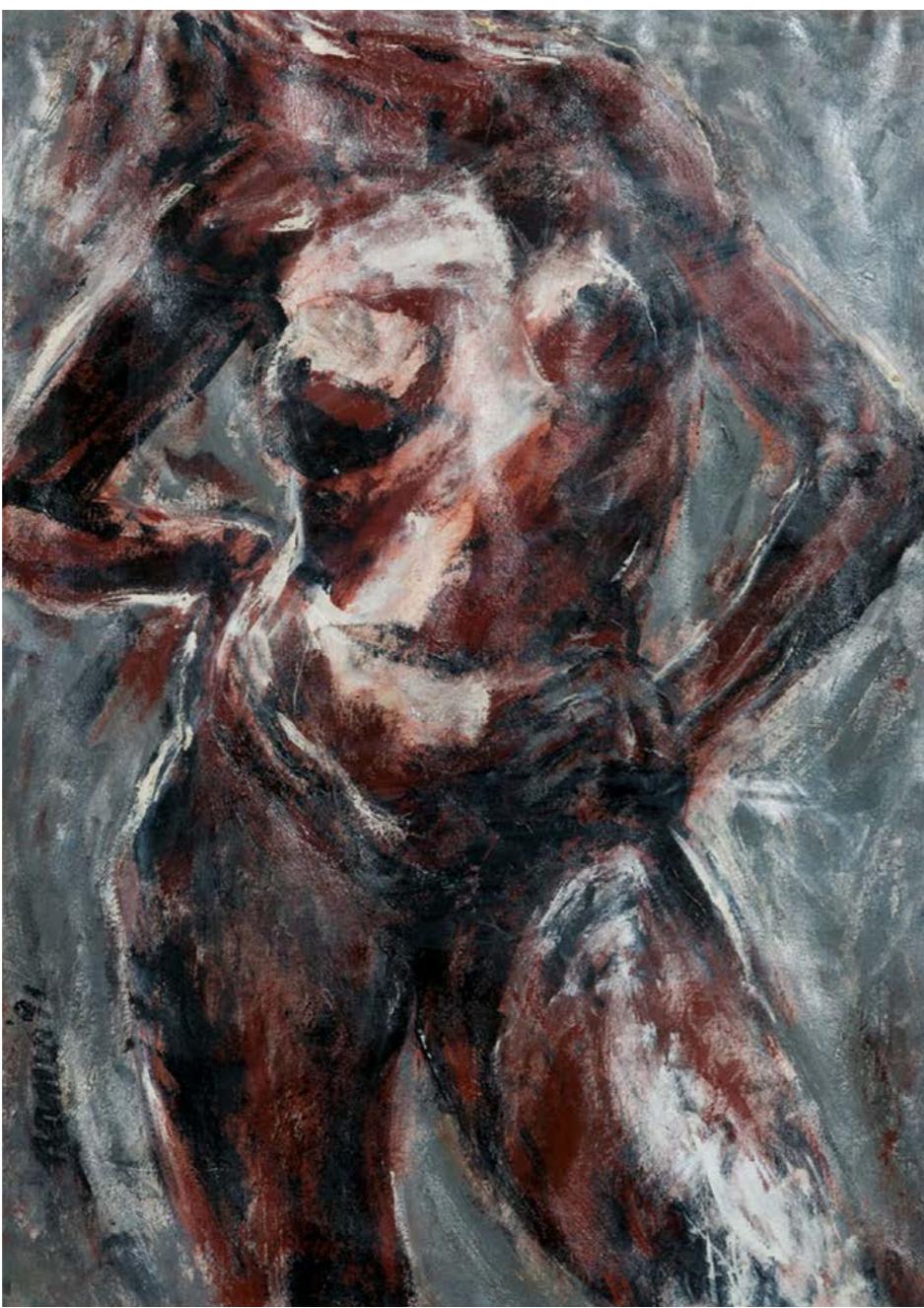


Charcoal Chalk Study of Chest Cavity Male Nude Reclining on His Back March 1991, 1991.
Charcoal and chalk on paper, 89 x 119 cm



Standing Female Nude Charcoal Drawing, 1991.
Charcoal and pastel on paper, 119 x 89 cm

Standing Female Nude, 1991, Acrylic on paper, 95.5 x 74.5 cm (Framed)



Top Nama '93, 1993. Charcoal on paper, 91 x 61 cm

Bottom Nama 2 October 1993, 1993. Charcoal and pastel on paper, 61 x 92 cm





Nama 10/93, 1993. Charcoal and pastel on paper, 102 x 73.5 cm

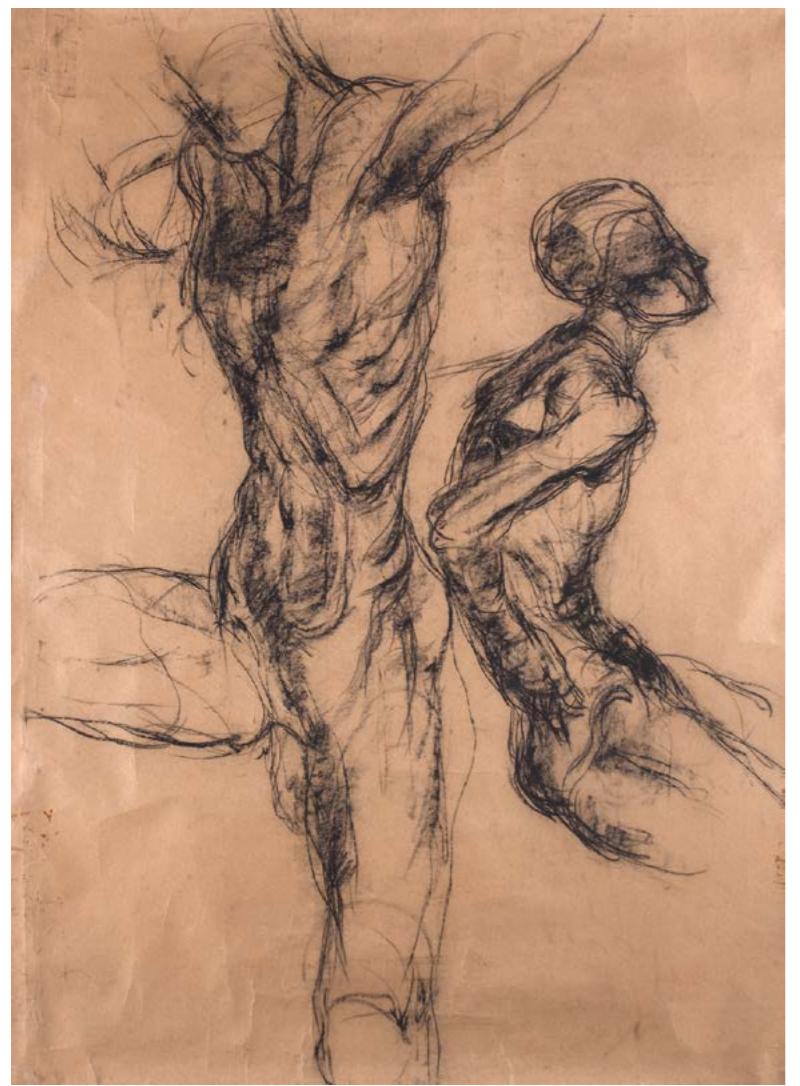


Untitled, 1993. Charcoal and pastel on paper, 119 x 89 cm



Charcoal study. Seated Nude "3/4" frontal view of chest cavity & abdominal structures, 1993. Charcoal on paper, 89 x 120 cm

March 1993, Charcoal study, standing male with raised arms, to be developed into painting, 1993. Charcoal on paper, 120 x 89 cm

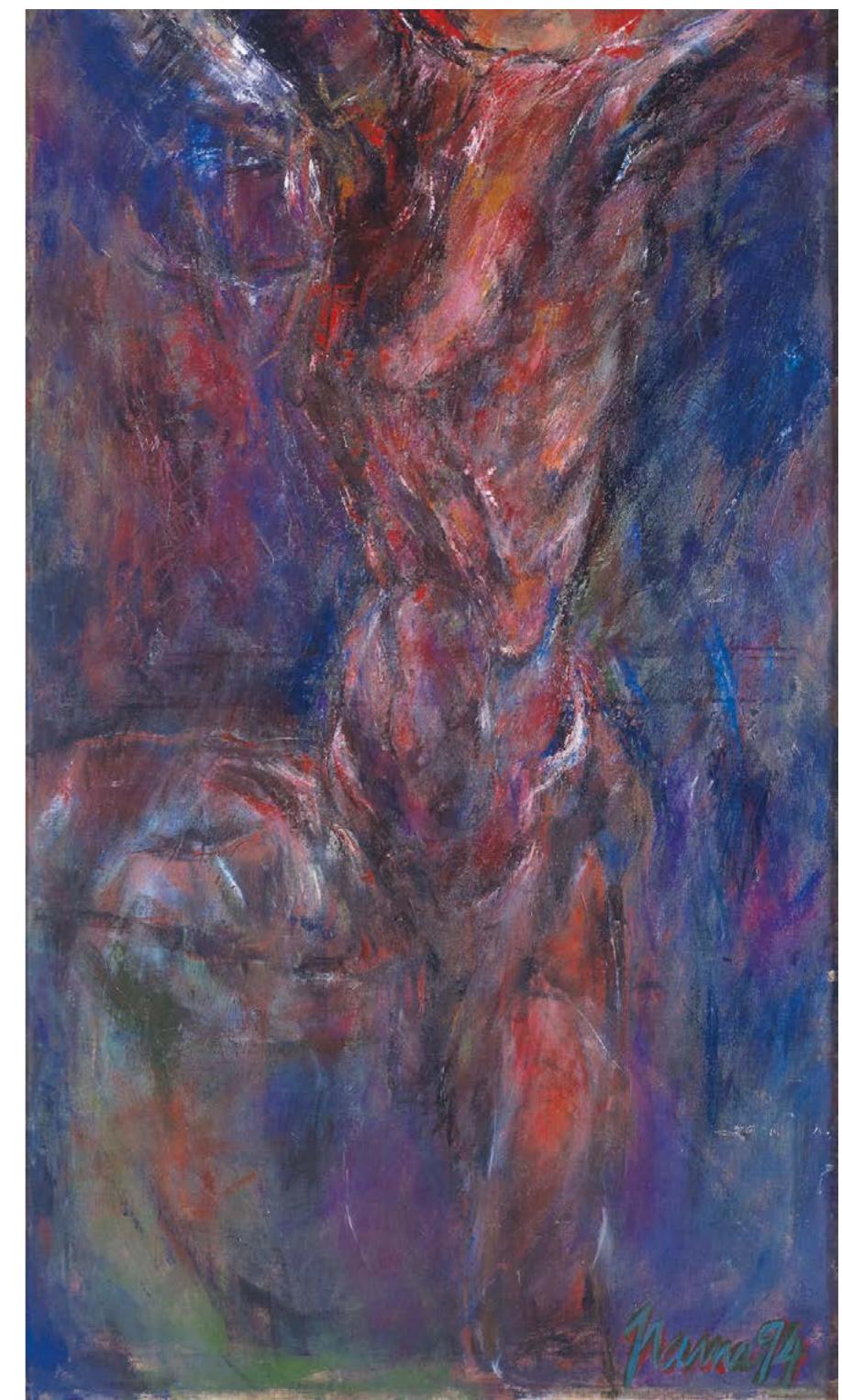


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Sketch of *Cosmic Balance*

Cosmic Balance, 1994. Acrylic and gouache on canvas, 127 x 77 cm



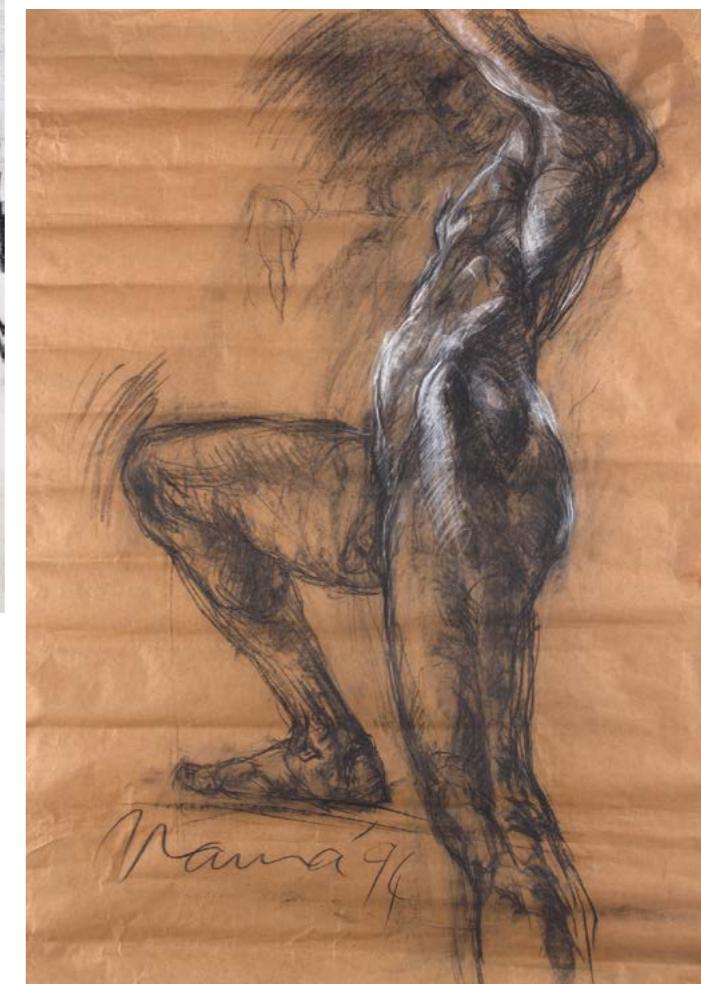
71



Below *Nama '94*, 1994. Charcoal and white pastel on paper, 91 x 61 cm



Top Left *Nama '94*, 1994. Charcoal and pastel on paper, 90 x 61 cm



Top Right *Nama '94*, 1994. Charcoal and pastel on paper, 119 x 89 cm

Charcoal Study and Crouching Nude 7, 1995. Charcoal and pastel on paper, 56 x 76.5 cm



Ink Wash, Female Nude '95, 1995. Ink on paper, 63 x 84 cm

Seated Female Nude With Head Bent Down Charcoal White Chalk Highlights '95, 1995.
Charcoal and chalk on paper, 119 x 89 cm



Nama '95, 1995. Charcoal on paper, 86.5 x 86 cm

Seated Nude Male Charcoal, Male Nude (Charcoal Study) 95, 1995.
Charcoal on paper, 119 x 89 cm





Nama '95, 1995. Charcoal and white pastel on paper, 89 x 59.5 cm



Nama '95, 1995. Charcoal and white pastel on paper, 86 x 86 cm



Left *Untitled*, 1995. Charcoal and chalk on paper, 119 x 89 cm

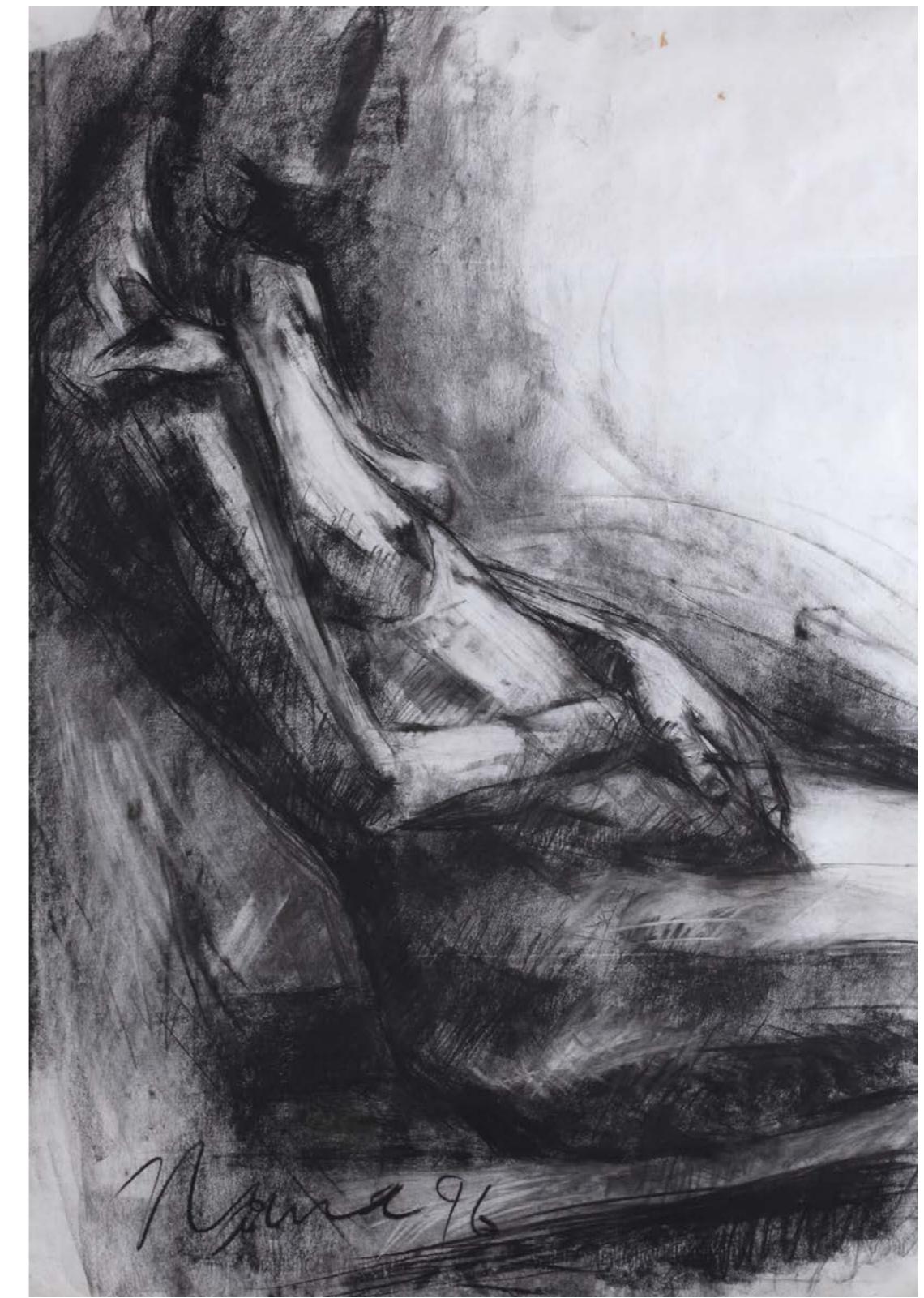
Above *Nama '95*, 1995. Charcoal on paper, 85.5 x 86 cm



Nama '96, 1996. Charcoal and pastel on paper, 61.5 x 83.5 cm



Nama '96, 1996. Charcoal on paper, 91.5 x 61 cm

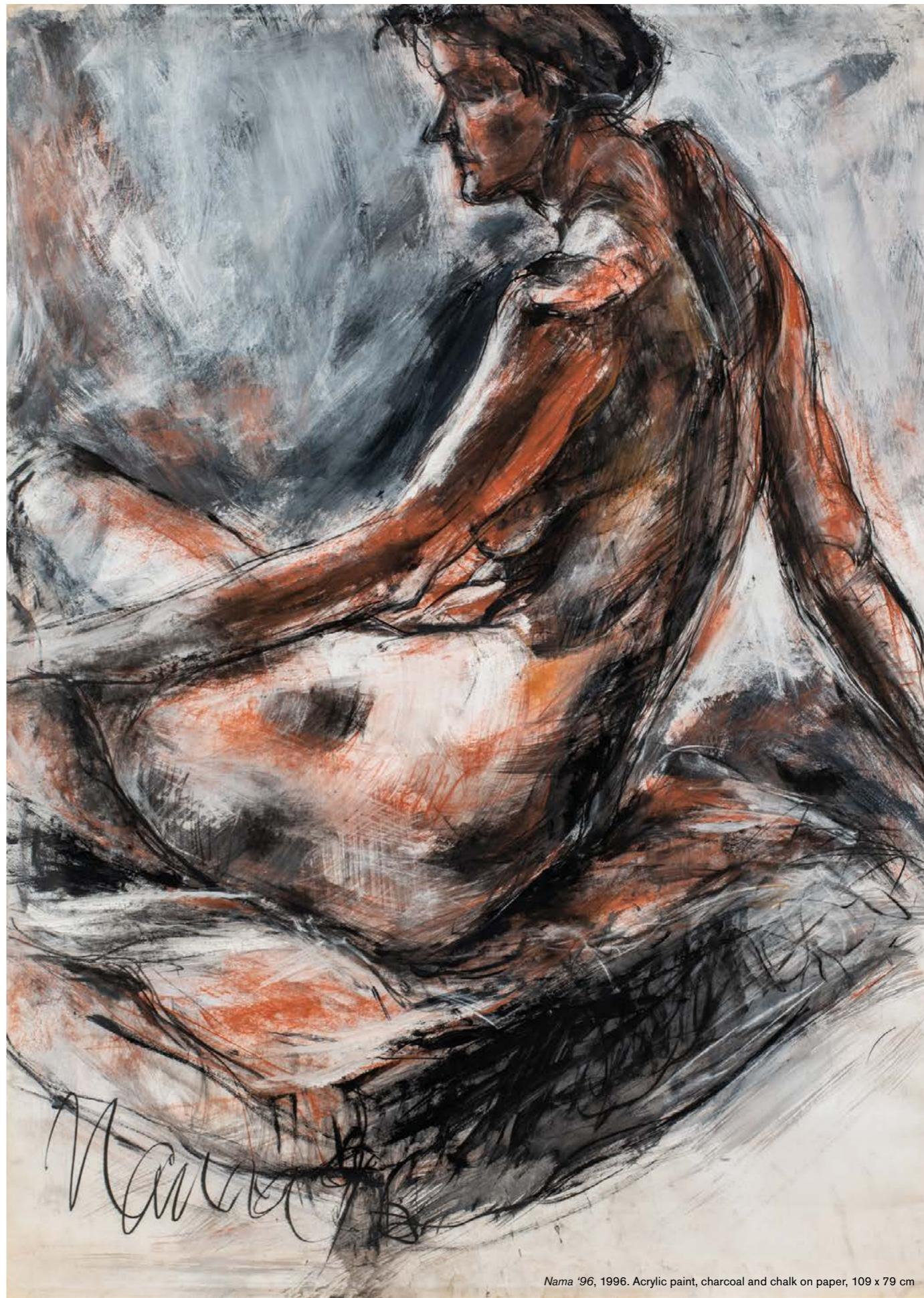




Nama '96, 1996. Charcoal on paper, 91.5 x 61 cm

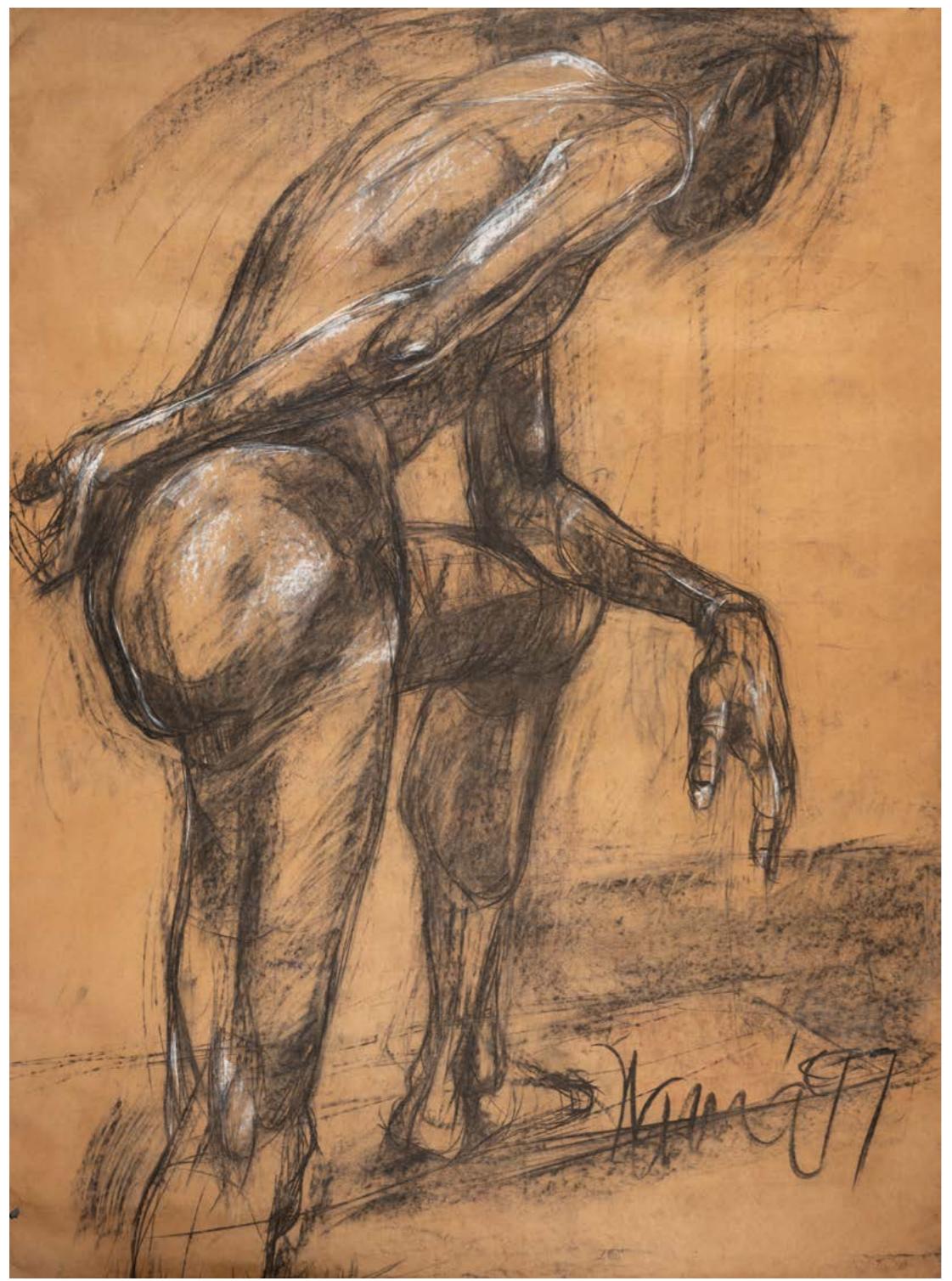


Seated Male Nude Charcoal, 1996. Charcoal on paper, 109 x 79 cm



Nama '96, 1996. Acrylic paint, charcoal and chalk on paper, 109 x 79 cm

Nama '97, 1997. Charcoal and chalk on paper, 120 x 109 cm

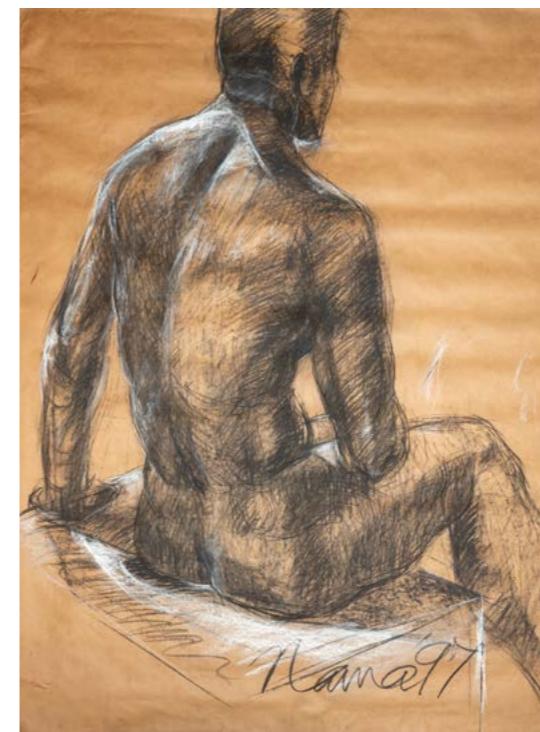


African Male Nude, 1997. Charcoal on paper, 101 x 76 cm



Untitled, 1997.
Charcoal and pastel on paper,
101.5 x 77 cm

Top *Nama '97*, 1997. Charcoal on paper, 61 x 89 cm
Middle *Untitled*, 1997. Charcoal and pastel on paper, 119 x 89 cm
Bottom *Nama 97*, 1997. Charcoal on paper, 70 x 50 cm





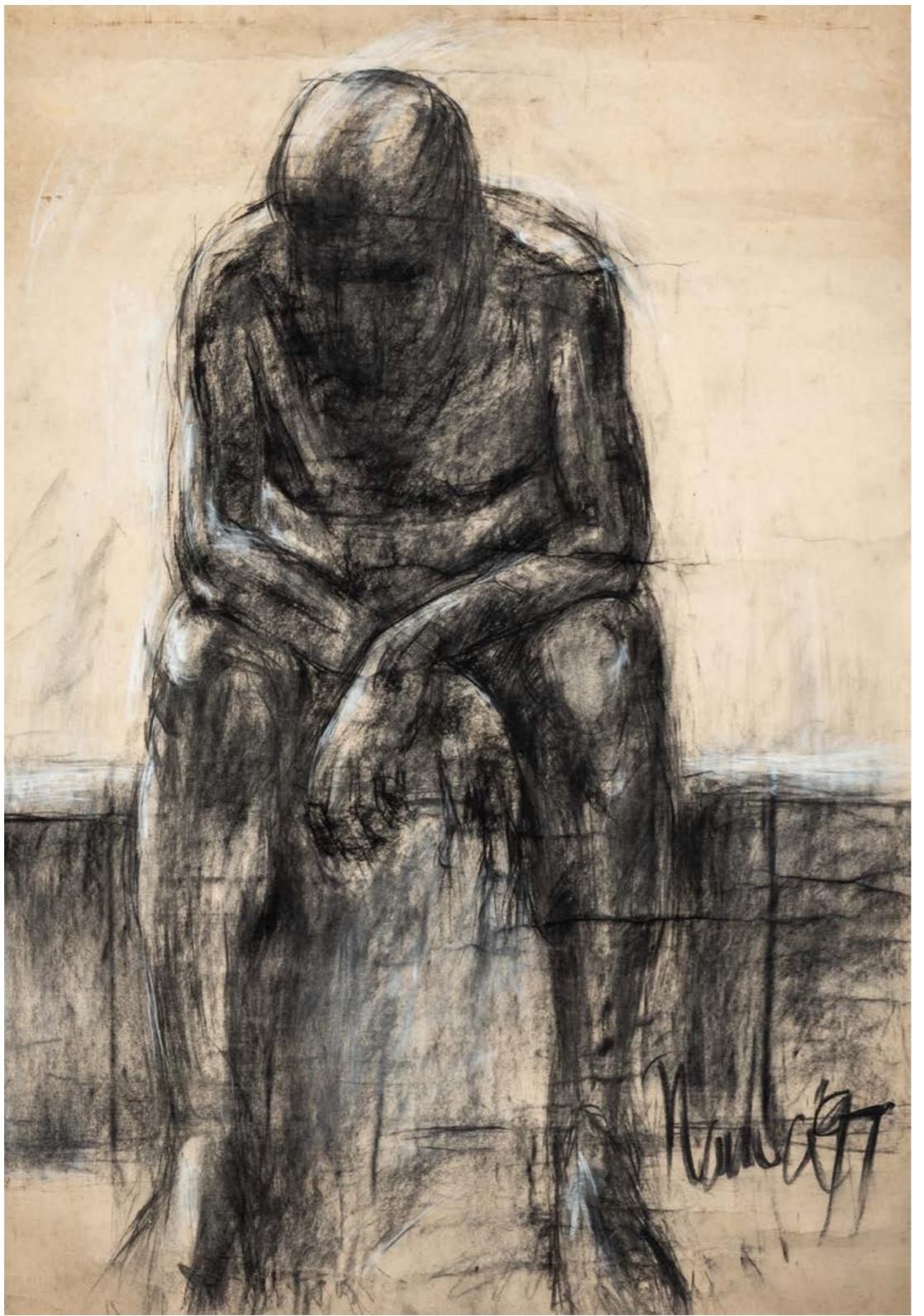




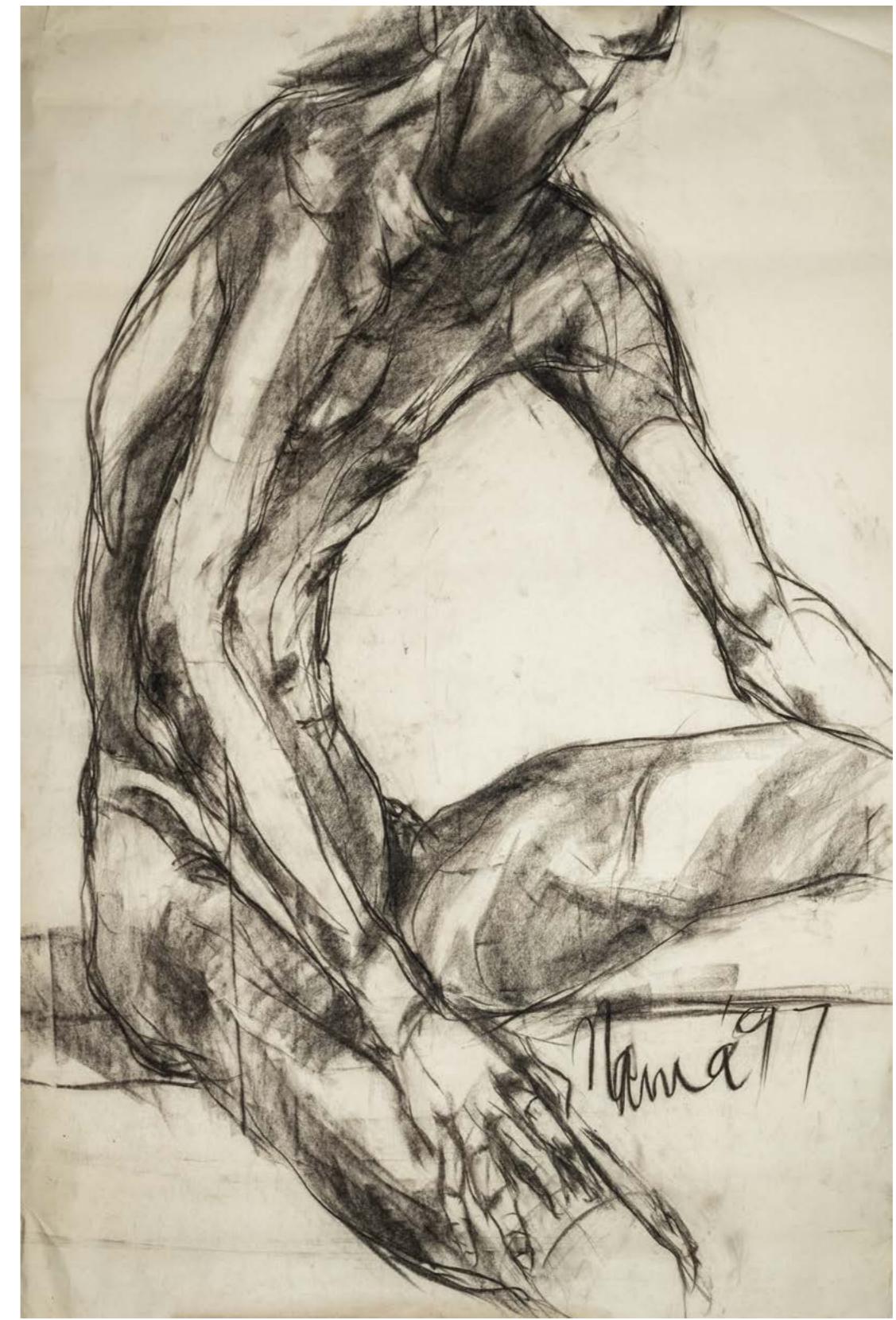
Left *Nama, June 97*', Gouache, 1997. Gouache on paper, 102.5 x 73 cm



Below *Nama '97*, 1997. Pastel and charcoal on paper, 89 x 119 cm



Nama '97, 1997. Charcoal and pastel on paper, 99.5 x 70 cm

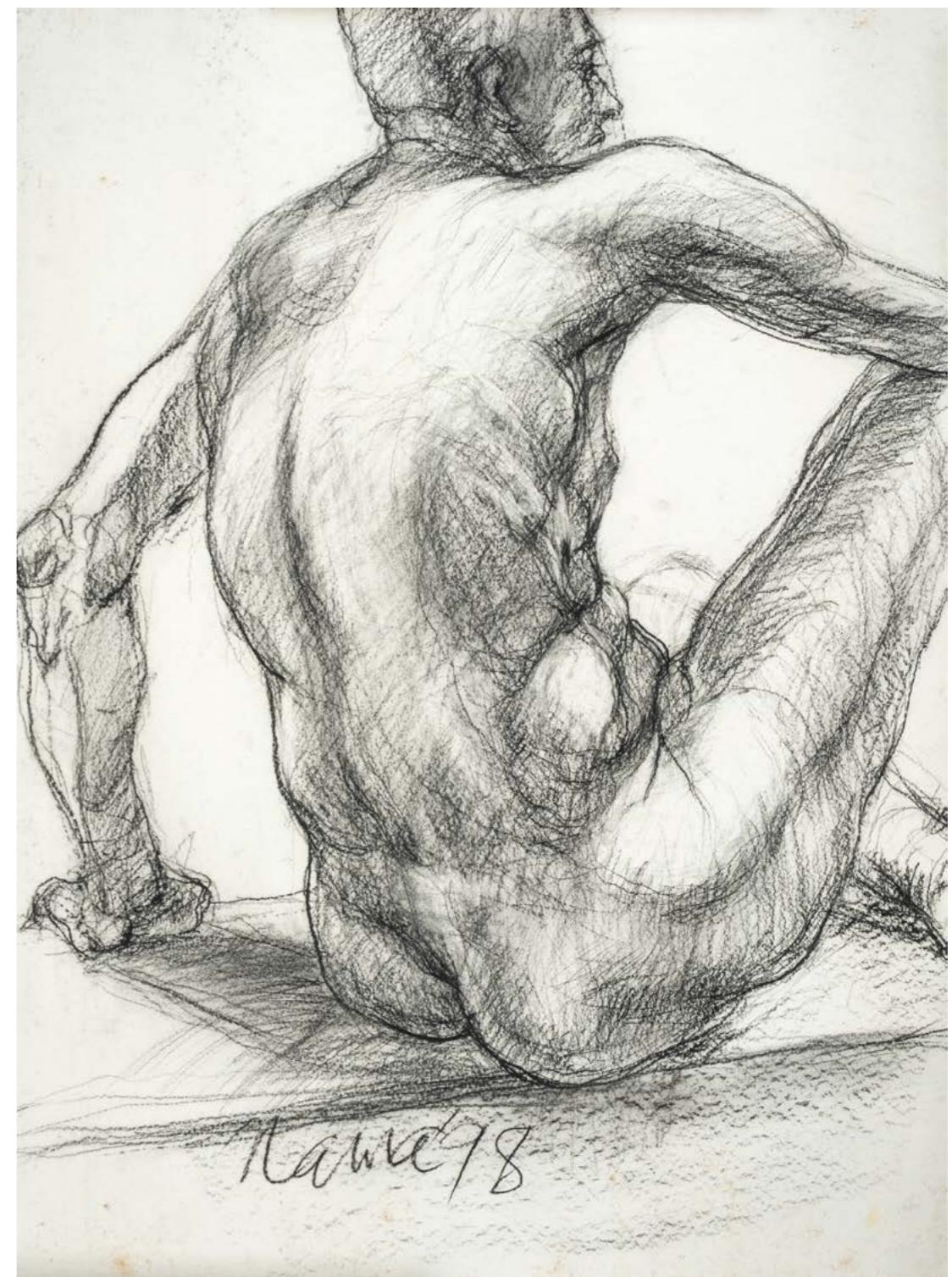


Nama '97, 1997. Charcoal on paper, 91.5 x 62 cm



Nama '97, 1997. Charcoal on paper, 109 x 79 cm

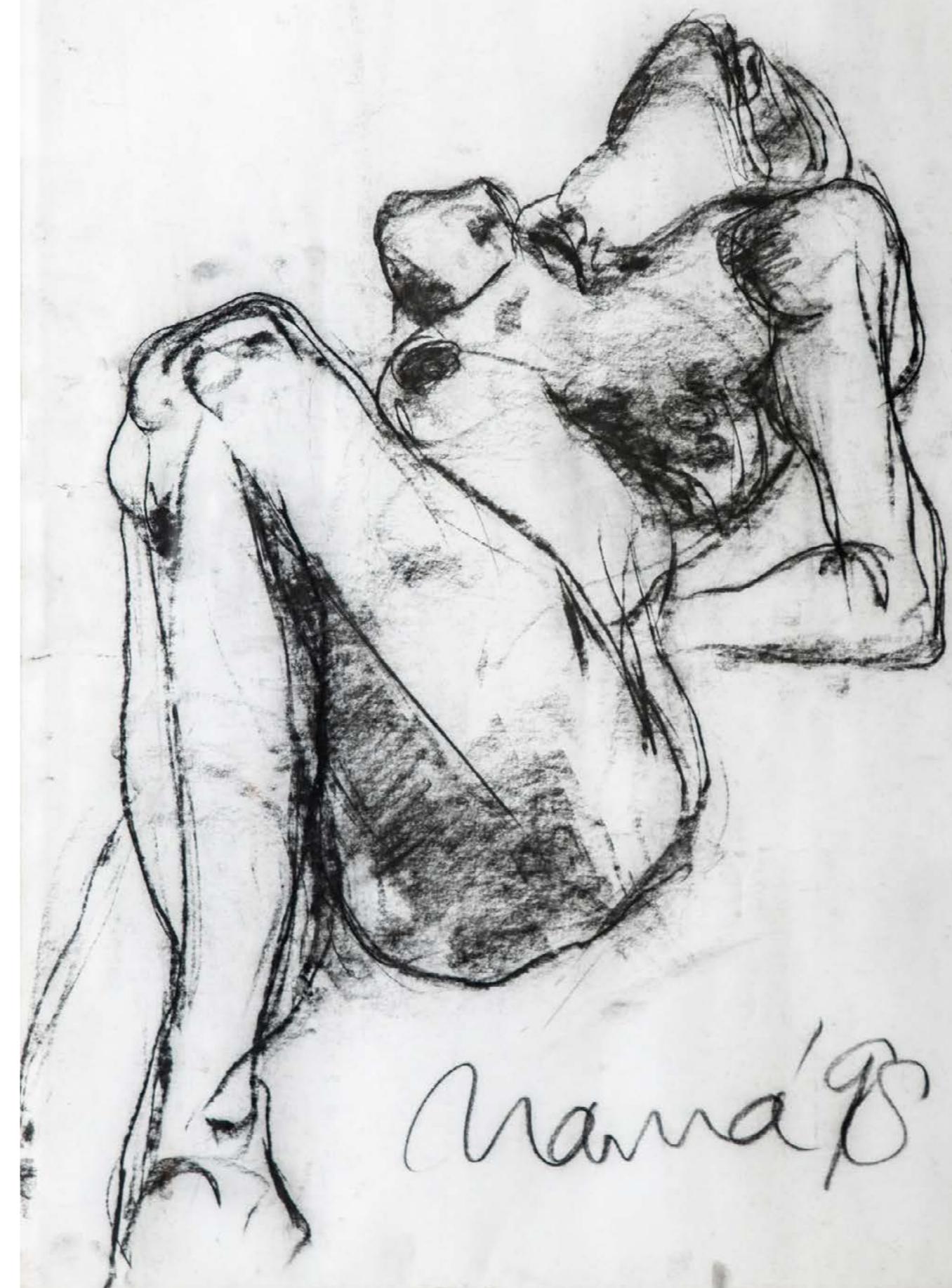
Nama '98, 1998. Charcoal on paper, 76.5 x 56.5 cm

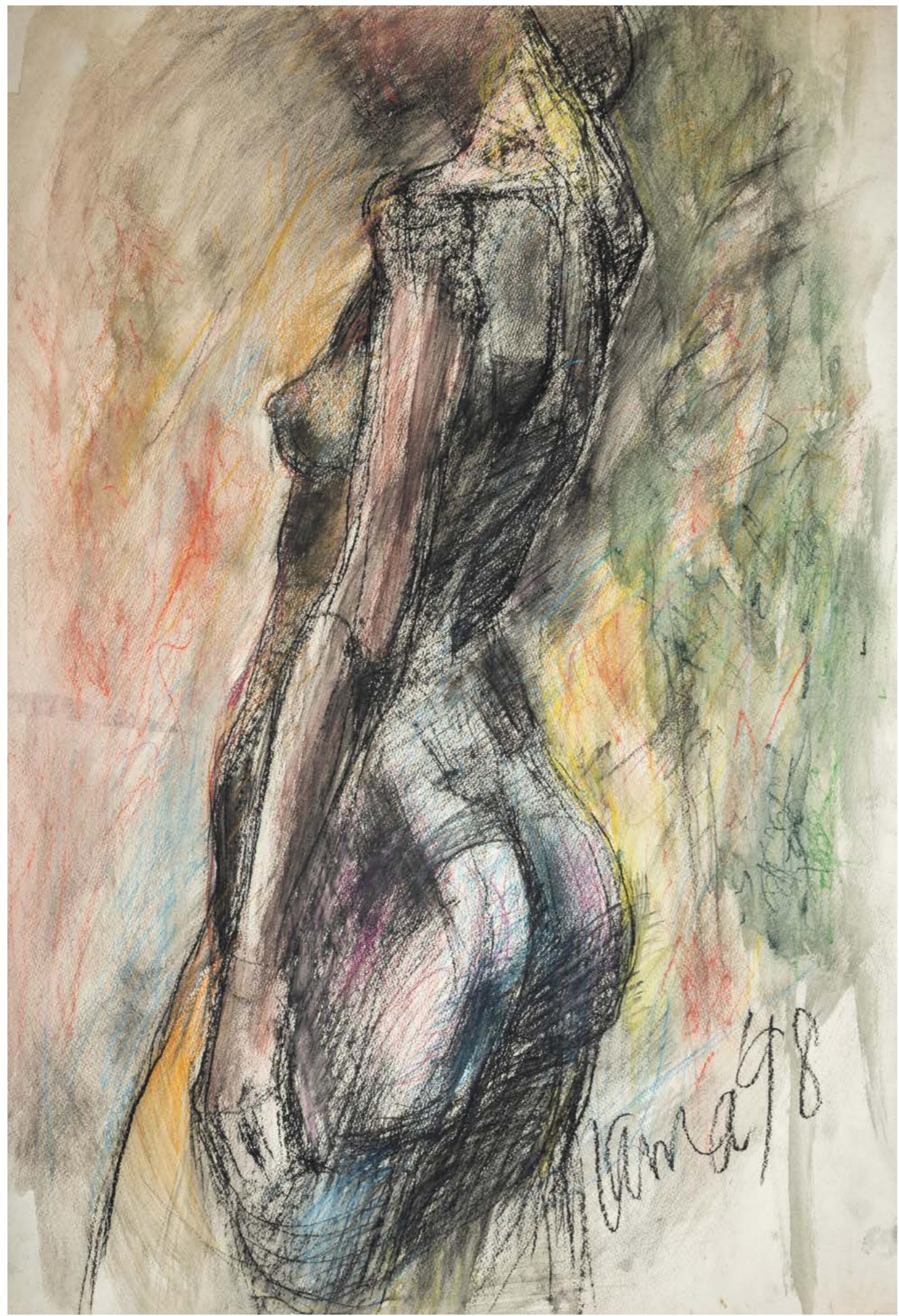


Rearview Seated Nude, Charcoal 98, 1998. Charcoal on paper, 76 x 55.5 cm



Nama '98, 1998. Charcoal on paper, 76 x 56 cm





Left Page *Nama '98*, 1998. Watercolour and pastel on paper, 78.5 x 54 cm

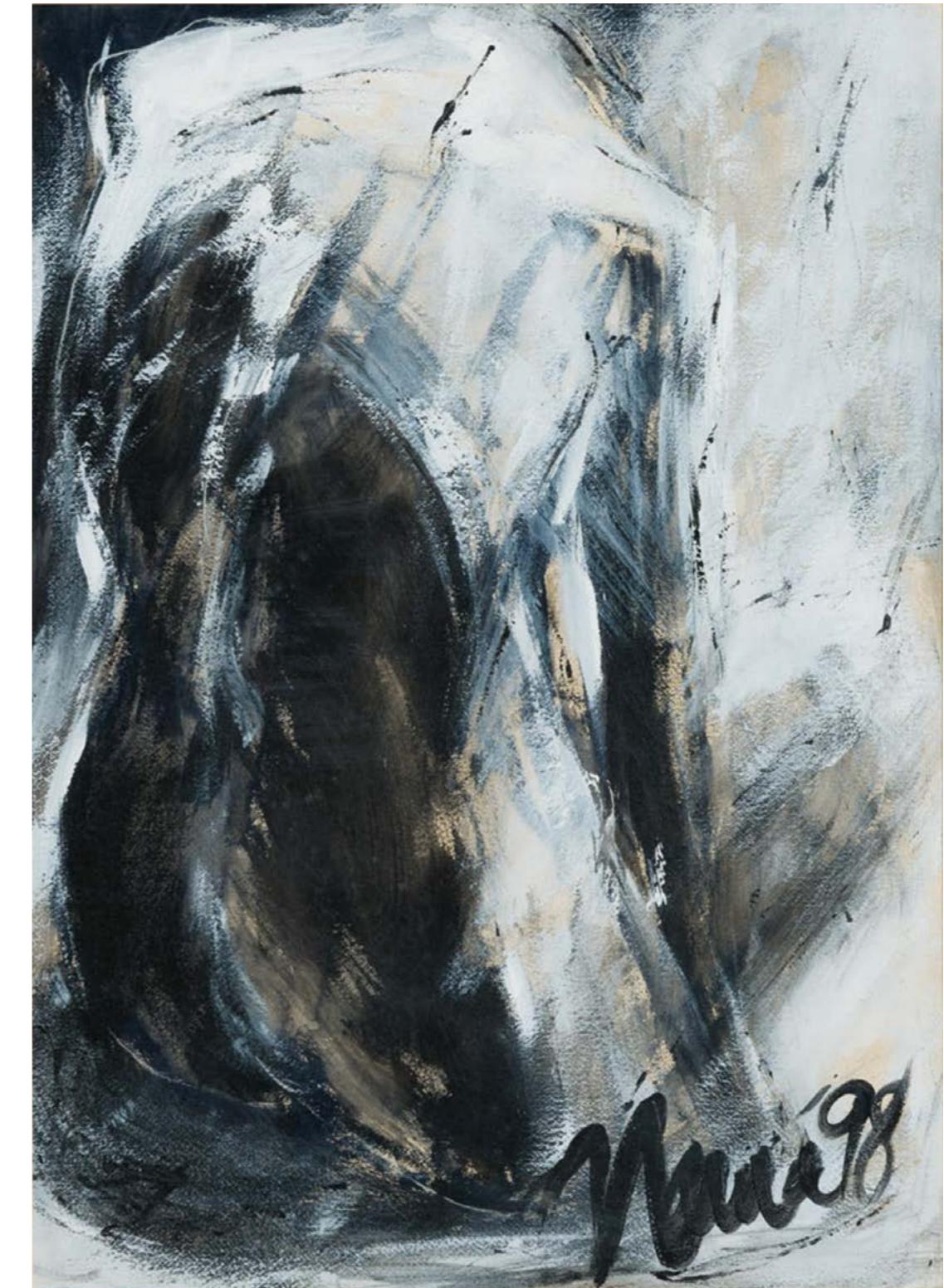
Top Left *Female Seated with One Leg Against Torso, Charcoal, Composition Drawing at the Back*, 1998. Charcoal on paper, 91 x 61 cm
Bottom Right *Nama '98*, 1998. Charcoal and pastel on paper, 76 x 54.5 cm



Nama '98, 1998. Charcoal on paper, 76 x 56 cm



Nama '98, 1998. Charcoal on paper, 76 x 56 cm



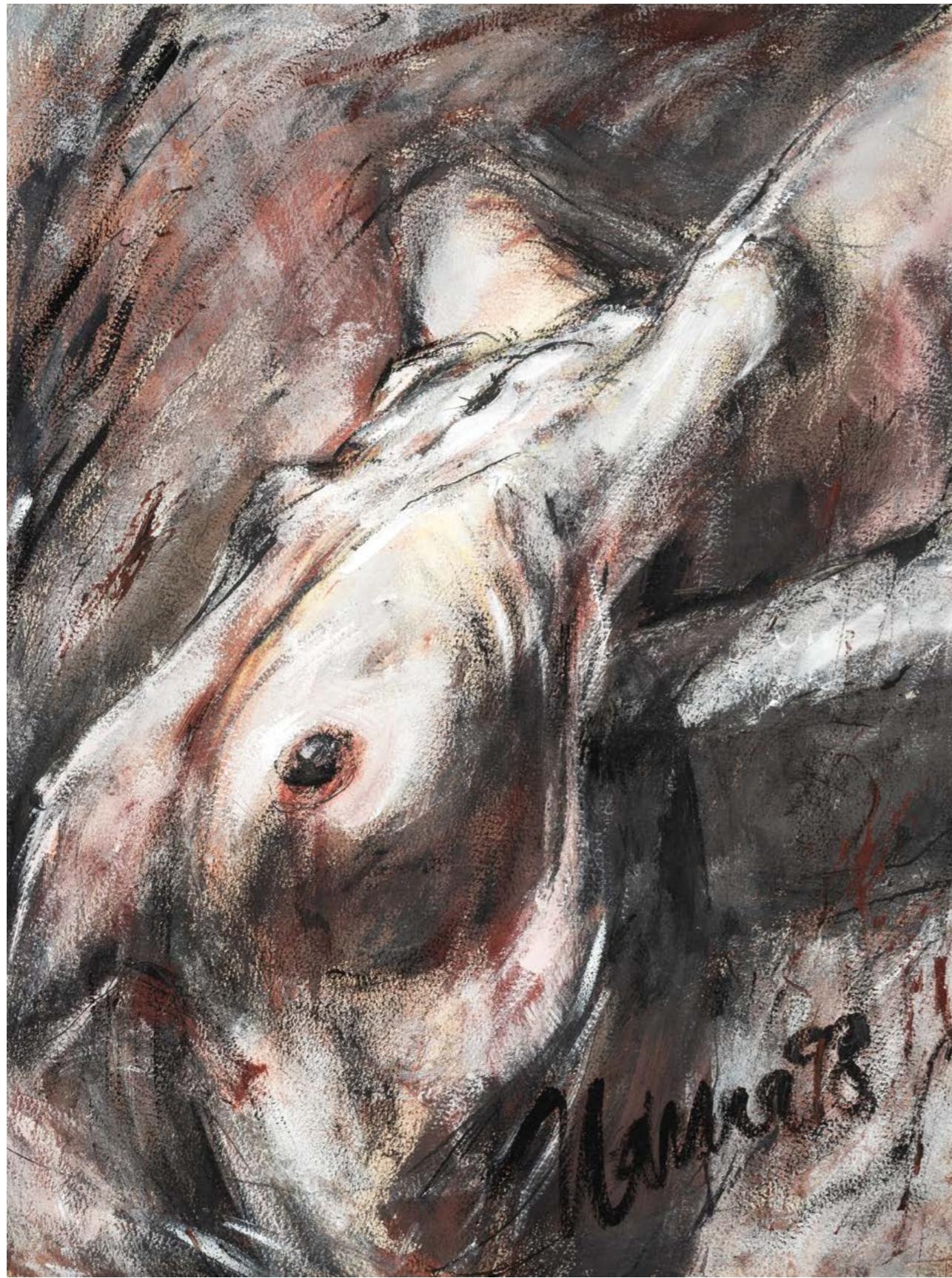
Nama '98, 1998. Gouache on paper, 73.5 x 53 cm

Nama '98, 1998. Charcoal on paper, 89 x 118 cm





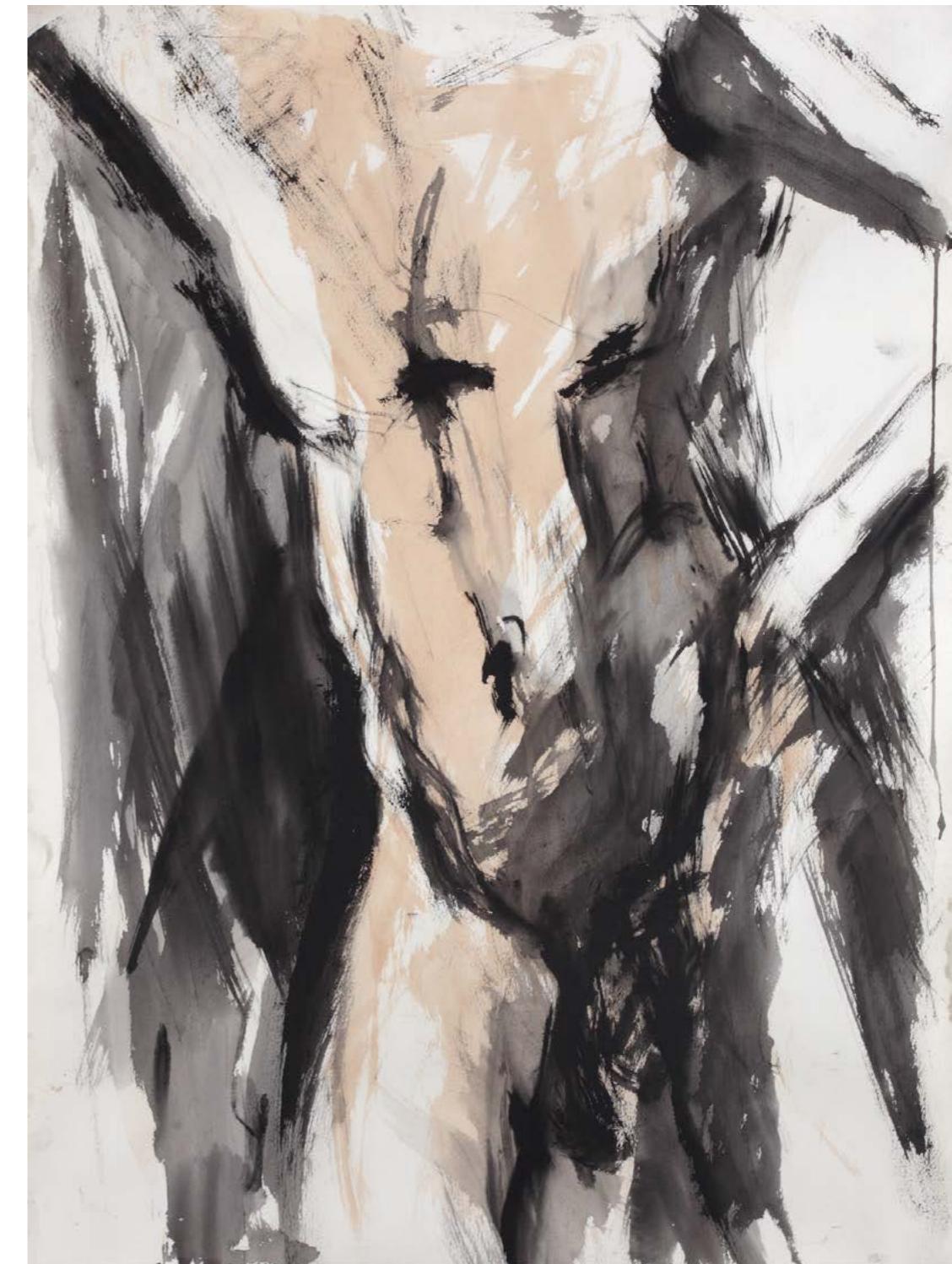
Nama '98, 1998. Gouache and pastel on paper, 76 x 56.5 cm



Seated Female Nude Back View Gouache Black '98, 1998. Gouache and pastel on paper, 102.5 x 72 cm



Female Torso Front View Gouache 99 Black and White,
1999. Gouache on paper, 55 x 49.5 cm



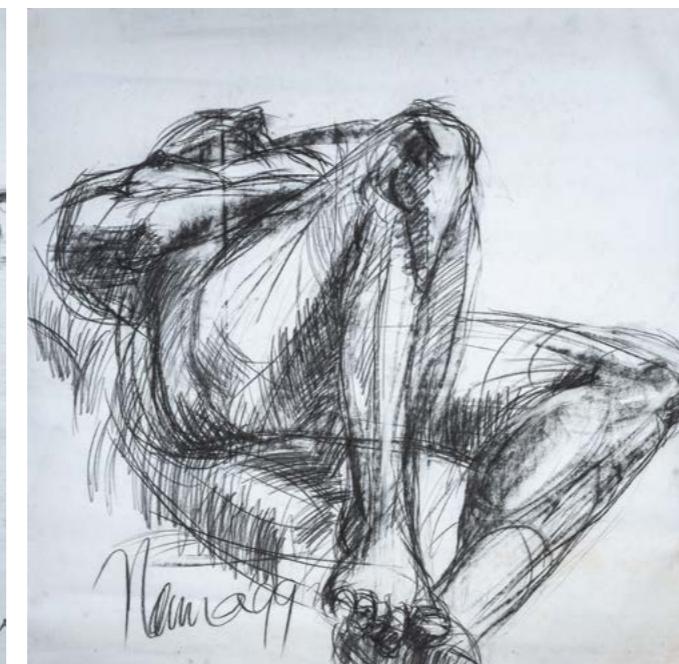
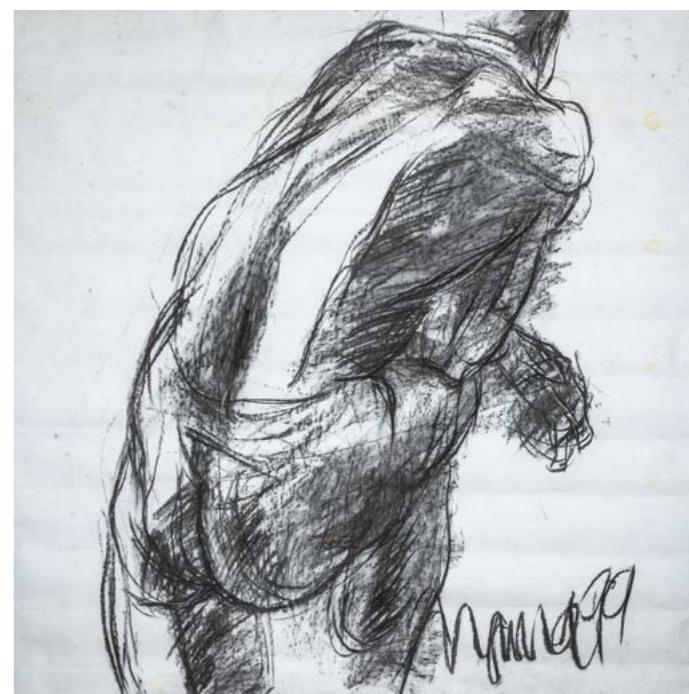
Male Torso '99, 1999. Gouache on paper, 76 x 57 cm

Top Row, L-R

Charcoal female nude 99, 1999. Charcoal on paper, 78.5 x 55.5 cm

Seated Female Nude, Rearview Charcoal, 1999. Charcoal on paper, 86 x 86 cm

Torso rearview male, 1999. Charcoal on paper, 86.5 x 86 cm



Bottom Row, L-R

Seated Female Nude Rear View, 1999. Charcoal on paper, 86.5 x 86.5 cm

Nama '99, 1999. Charcoal on paper, 86.5 x 86 cm

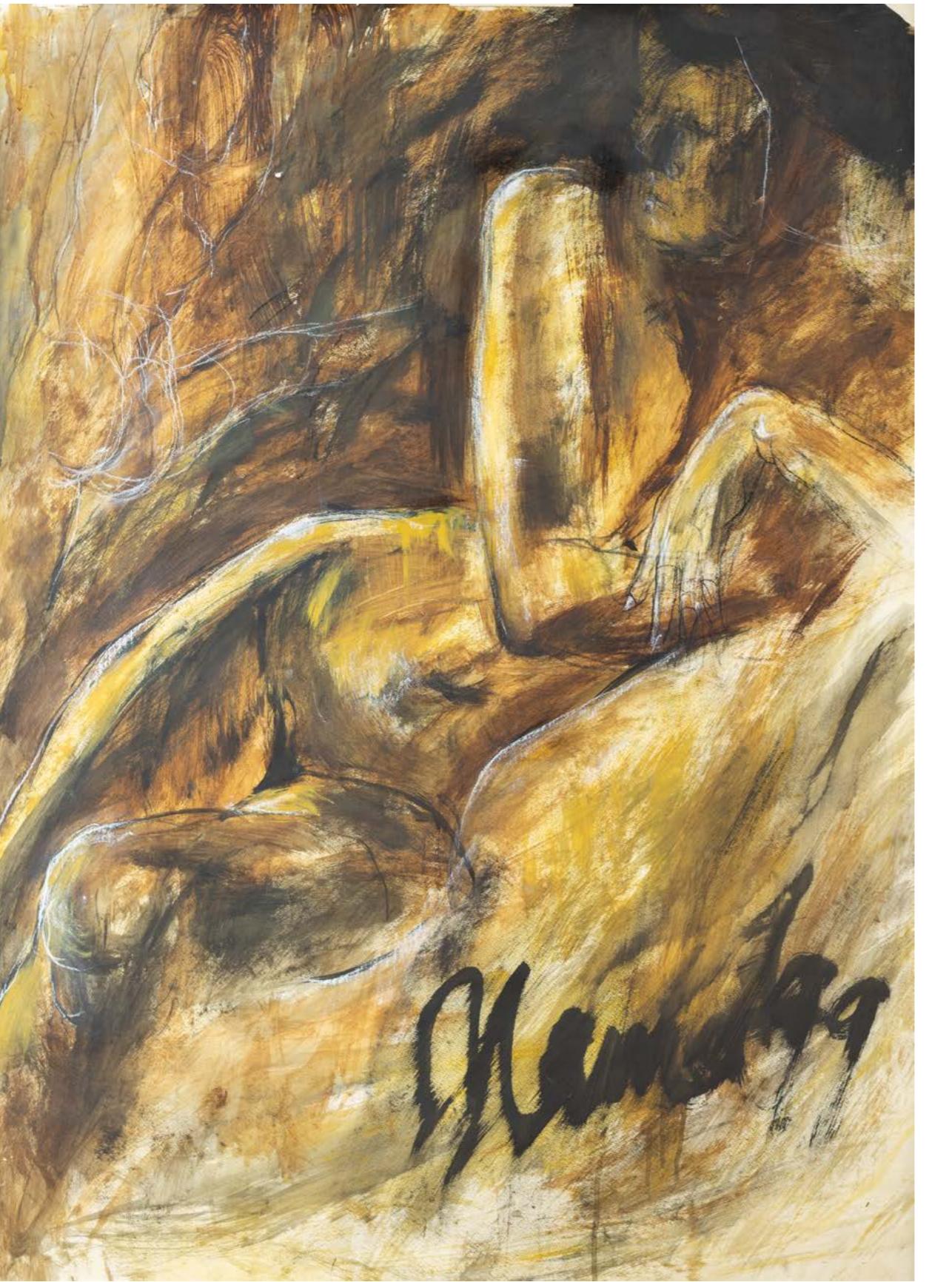
Nama '99, 1999. Charcoal on paper, 86 x 86 cm

Top Standing Female Nude Lines. 1999. Charcoal on paper, 108.5 x 79 cm
Bottom Nama '99, 1999. Charcoal and pastel on paper, 89 x 119 cm

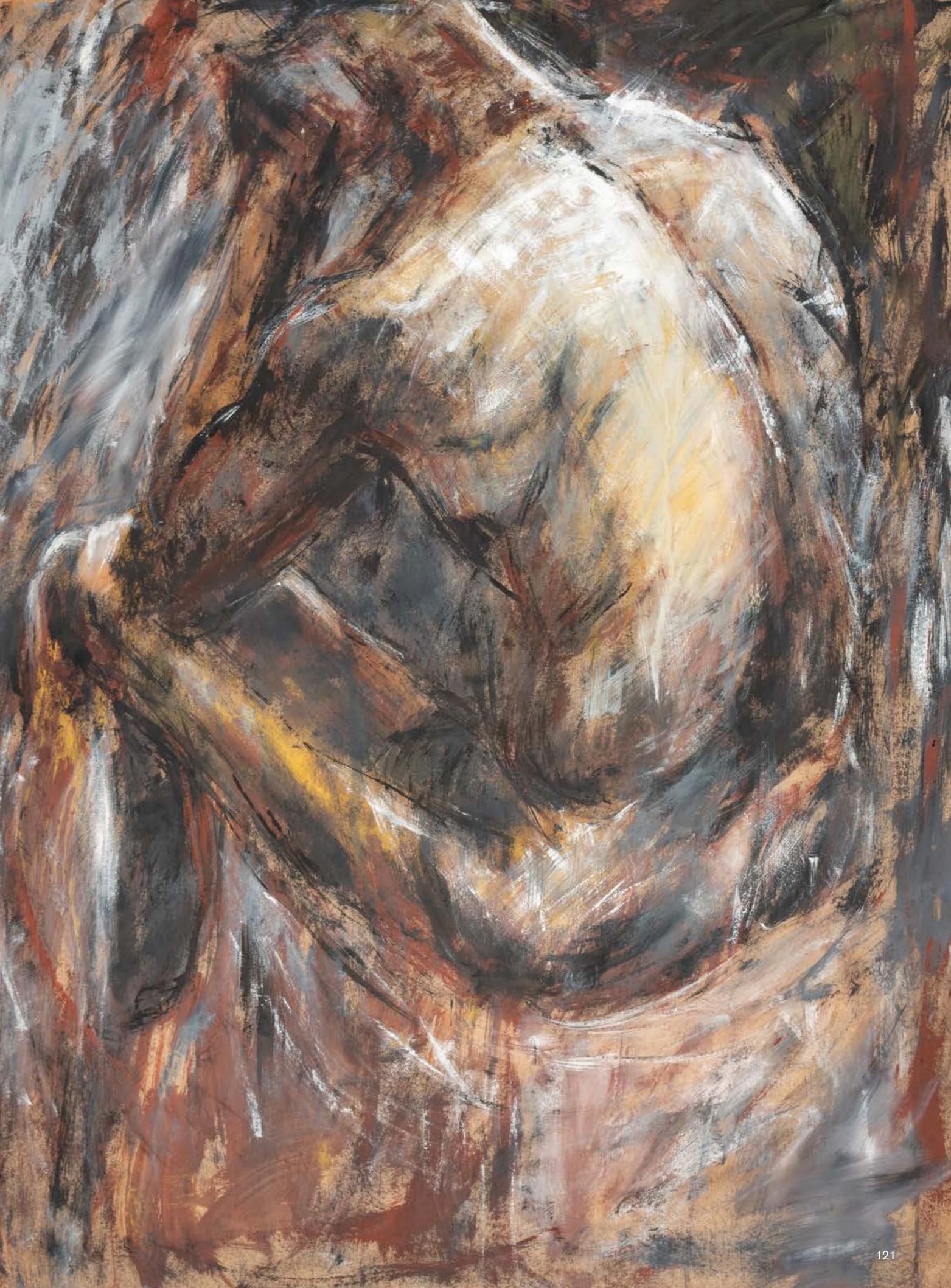


Nama '99, 1999. Charcoal and pastel on paper, 120 x 90 cm

Below Reclining Nude, Acrylic 2, 1999. Acrylic and pastel on paper, 109.5 x 78.5 cm



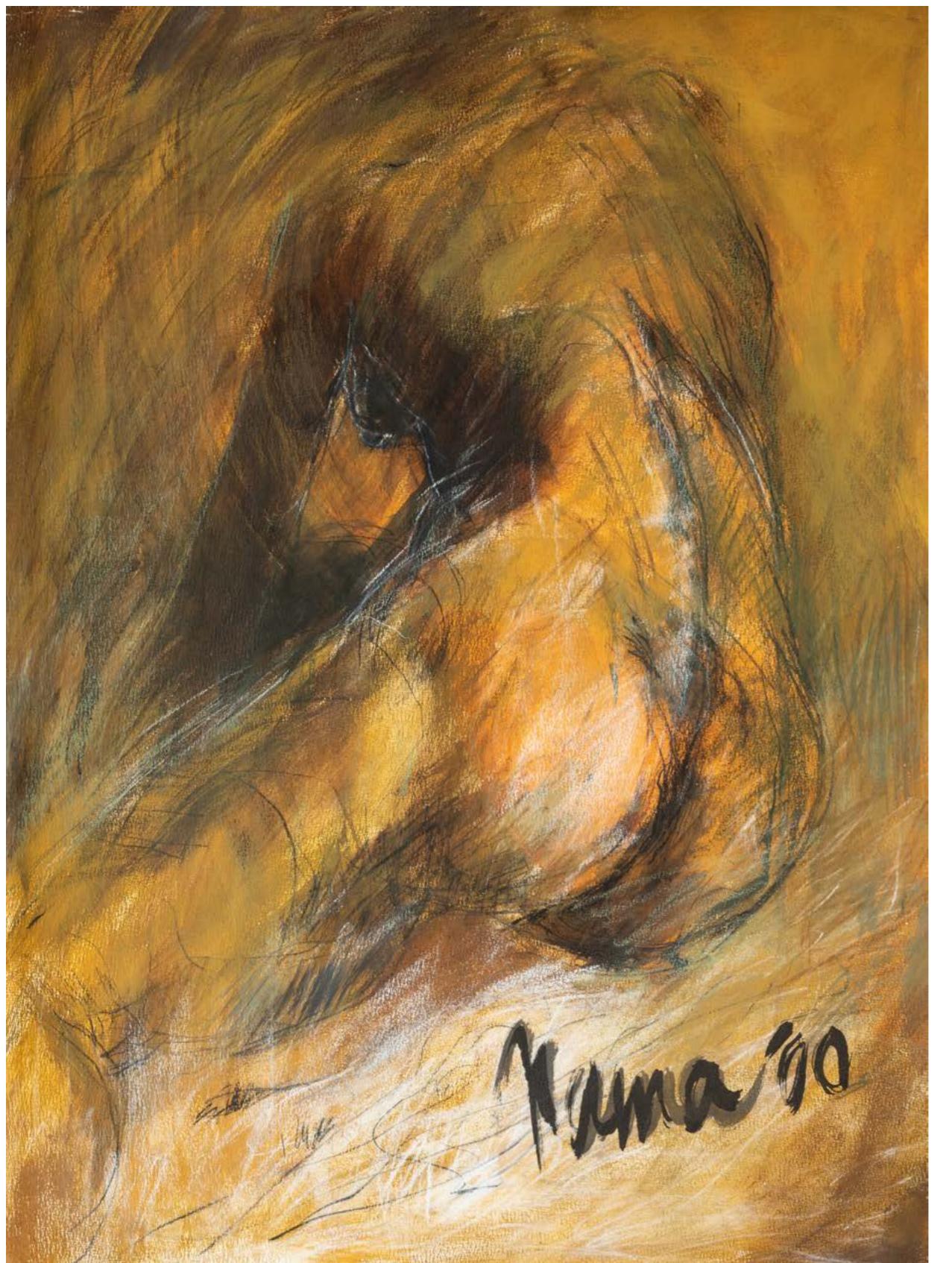
Right Male Nude Seated 3/4 View, 1999. Gouache on paper, 120 x 89 cm





Left *Untitled*, 1999. Ink and pastel on paper, 119 x 89 cm

Above *Untitled*, 1999. Ink and gouache on paper, 86 x 86.5 cm

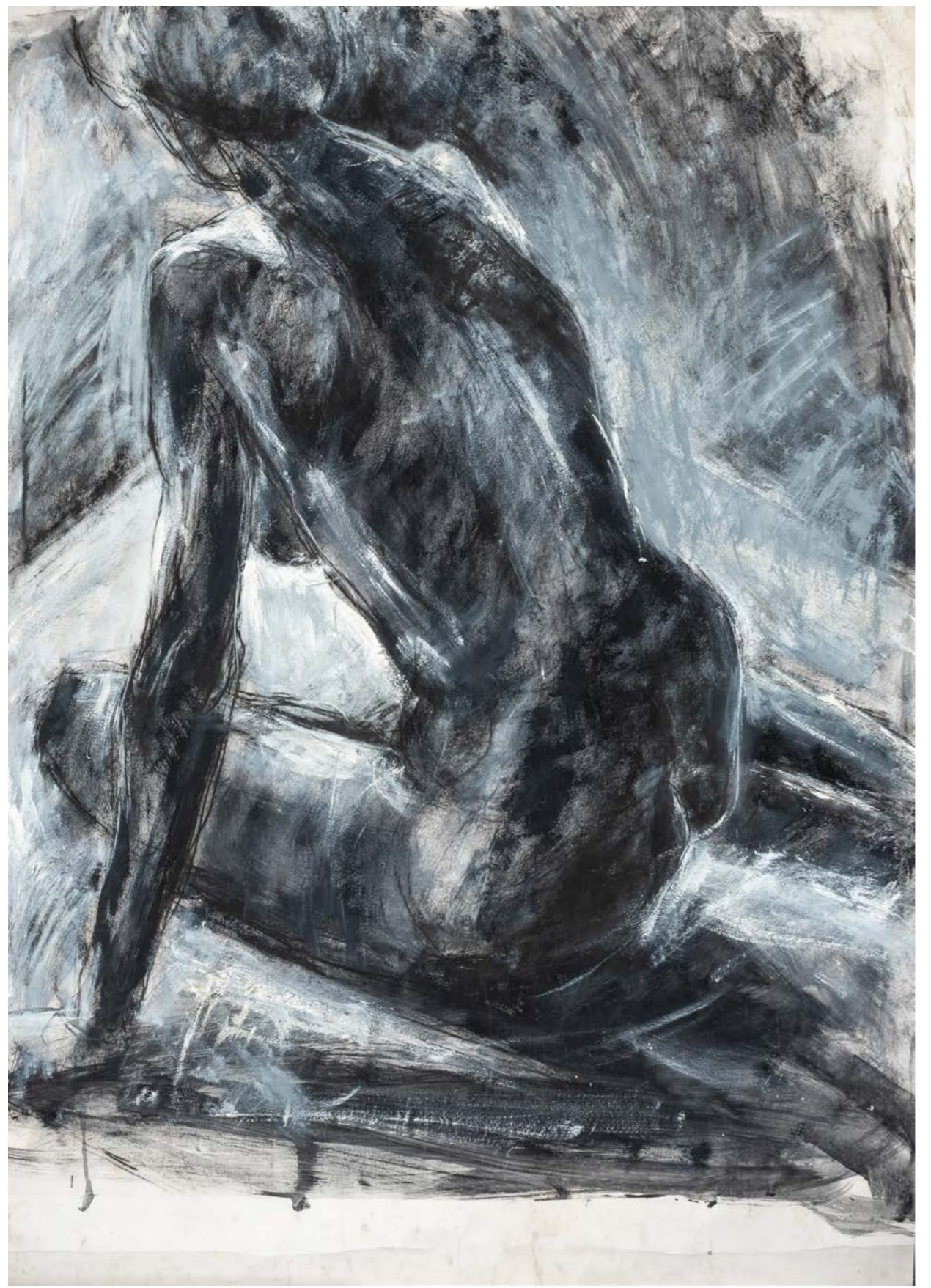


Acrylic female painting 2000, 2000. Acrylic, charcoal, and pastel on paper, 75.7 x 56.5 cm



Female Acrylic, 2000. Acrylic on paper, 75.5 x 56.5 cm

Black and White Female Nude 2 '00, 2000. Gouache on paper, 89 x 64.5 cm



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Nama '00, 2000, Gouache on paper, 115 x 91.5 cm (Framed)

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Top Right *Nama 20*, Undated. Brown pastel and charcoal on paper, 108.5 x 78 cm
Bottom Left *Nama '00*, 2000. Charcoal on paper, 91 x 62 cm



Right *Nama 12 '00*, 2000. Charcoal on paper, 94 x 64 cm



Acrylic Female Nude 01, Drawing and Wash, 2001.

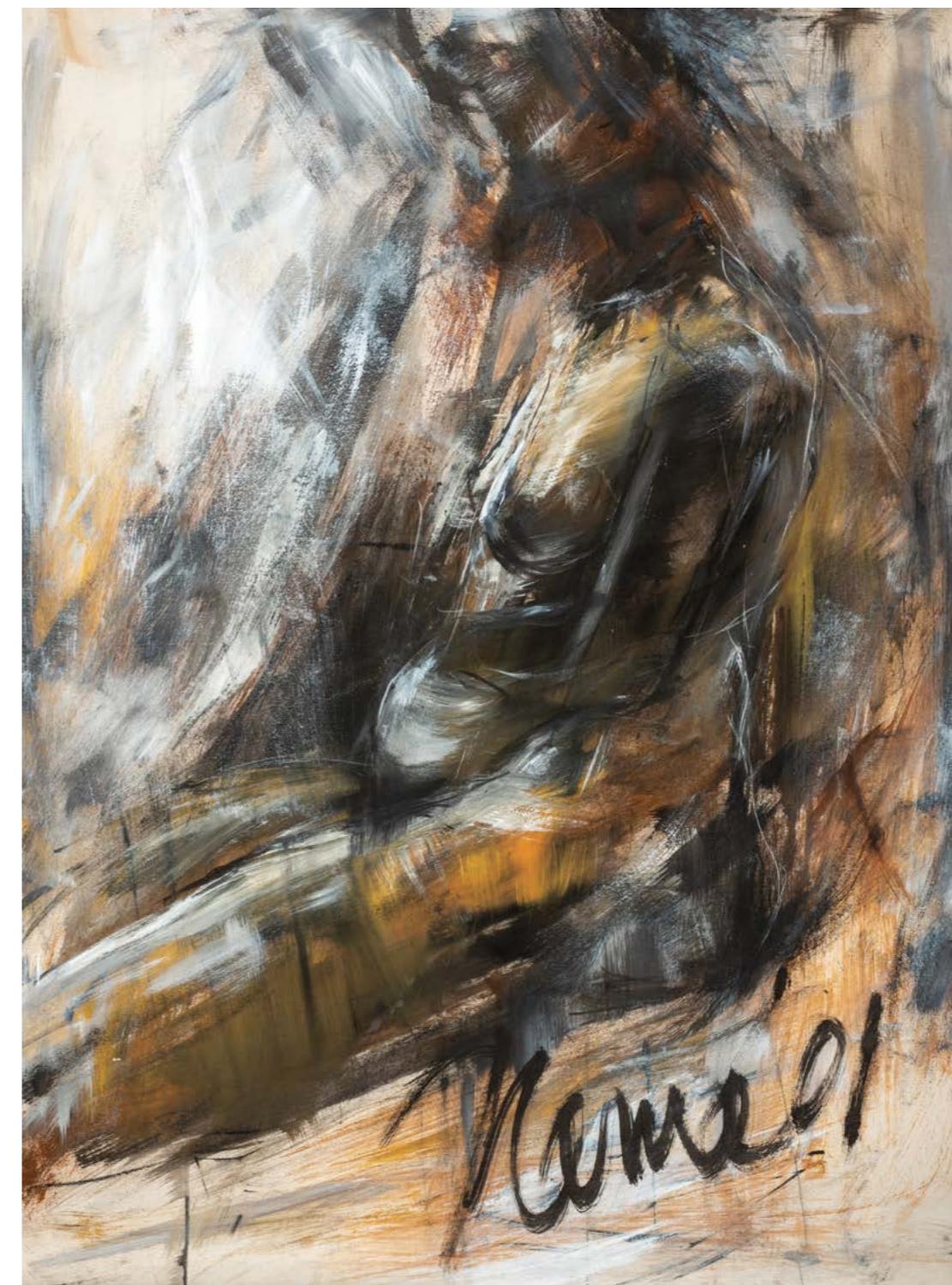
Acrylic on paper, 59.5 x 84 cm





Female Nude Ink Wash Drawing 01, 2001. Ink on paper, 84 x 59 cm

Mixed Media Female Seated, 2001. Mixed media, gouache, ink, and pastel on paper, 76 x 56 cm





Above *Nama '01*, 2001. Charcoal and white pastel on paper, 86 x 86 cm



Right *Nama '01*, 2001. Pastel and charcoal on paper, 120 x 90 cm



Nama '01, 2001. Ink and brown pastel on paper, 56 x 76 cm

Untitled, 2002. Ink and pastel on paper, 86.5 x 86.5 cm





Nama '01, 2001. Charcoal on paper, 58 x 91 cm



Reclining Nude Ink Drawing 01, 2001. Ink on paper, 86.5 x 85 cm



Figure in Transition, 2001. Acrylic and chalk on paper, 83 x 57.5 cm

Landscaped Nude 2002, 2002. Acrylic and charcoal on paper, 59.5 x 84 cm



Female Front View Ink/Wash, 2002. Ink on paper, 76 x 56 cm



Graphite Drawing on Nude '02, 2002. Ink on paper, 86 x 86 cm

Left Column, Top-Bottom

Nama '02, 2002. Charcoal and pastel on paper, 86 x 86.5 cm

Charcoal Drawing of Nude '02, 2002. Charcoal on paper, 93.5 x 63.5 cm



Nama 02, 2002. Ink, charcoal, and pastel on paper, 86 x 86 cm



Right Column, Top-Bottom

Untitled, 2002. Ink, charcoal, and pastel on paper, 86 x 84.5 cm

Female Nudes Drawings Charcoal, 2002. Charcoal and ink on paper, 86 x 86 cm

Nama '02, 2002. Ink on paper, 57 x 83 cm



Male Torso, 2002. Ink on paper, 82.5 x 58 cm





Nama '03, 2003. Charcoal on paper, 102 x 132 cm (Framed)

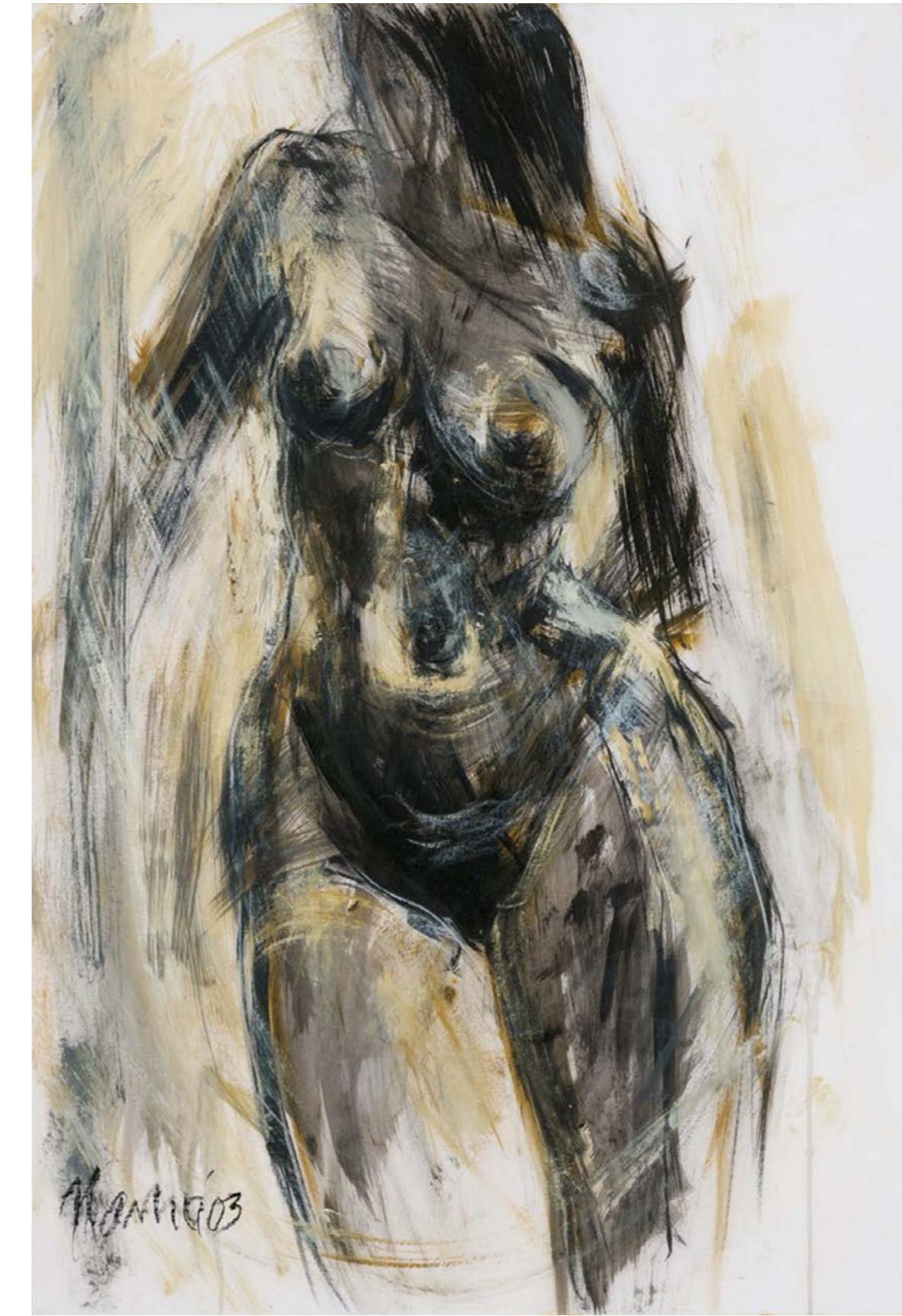
Nama '03, 2003. Ink and charcoal on paper, 72 x 50 cm



Figure Drawing II, 2003. Pen and ink on paper, 30 x 21 cm



Standing Nude, 2003, Graphic ink on paper, 105 x 79 cm



Nama '03, 2003. Ink on paper, 84 x 56 cm



Nama 03, 2003. Acrylic on canvas, 90 x 121 cm



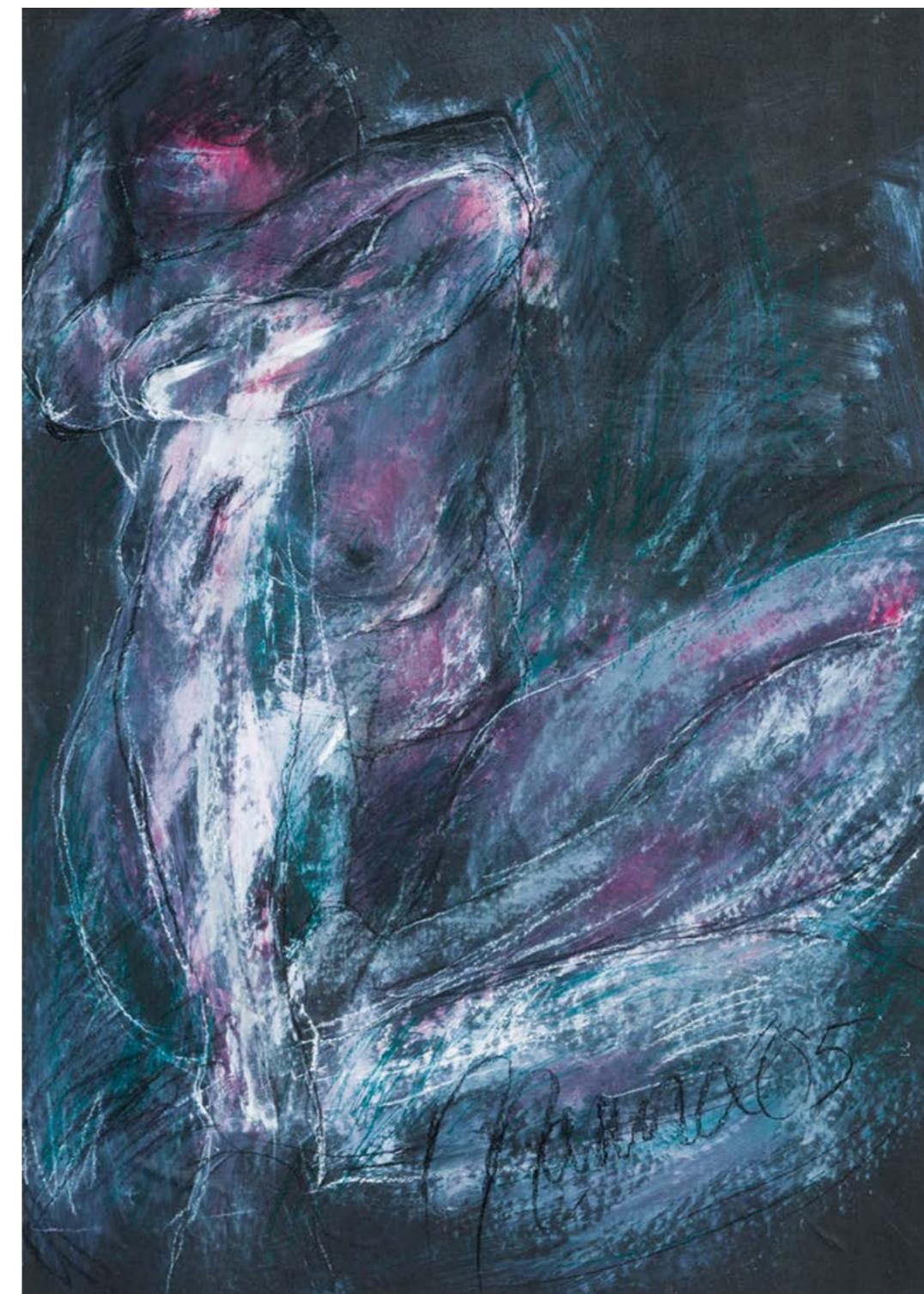
Nama '04, 2004. Ink on paper, 114.5 x 84 cm



Nama '04, 2004. Ink and gouache on paper, 92 x 83 cm

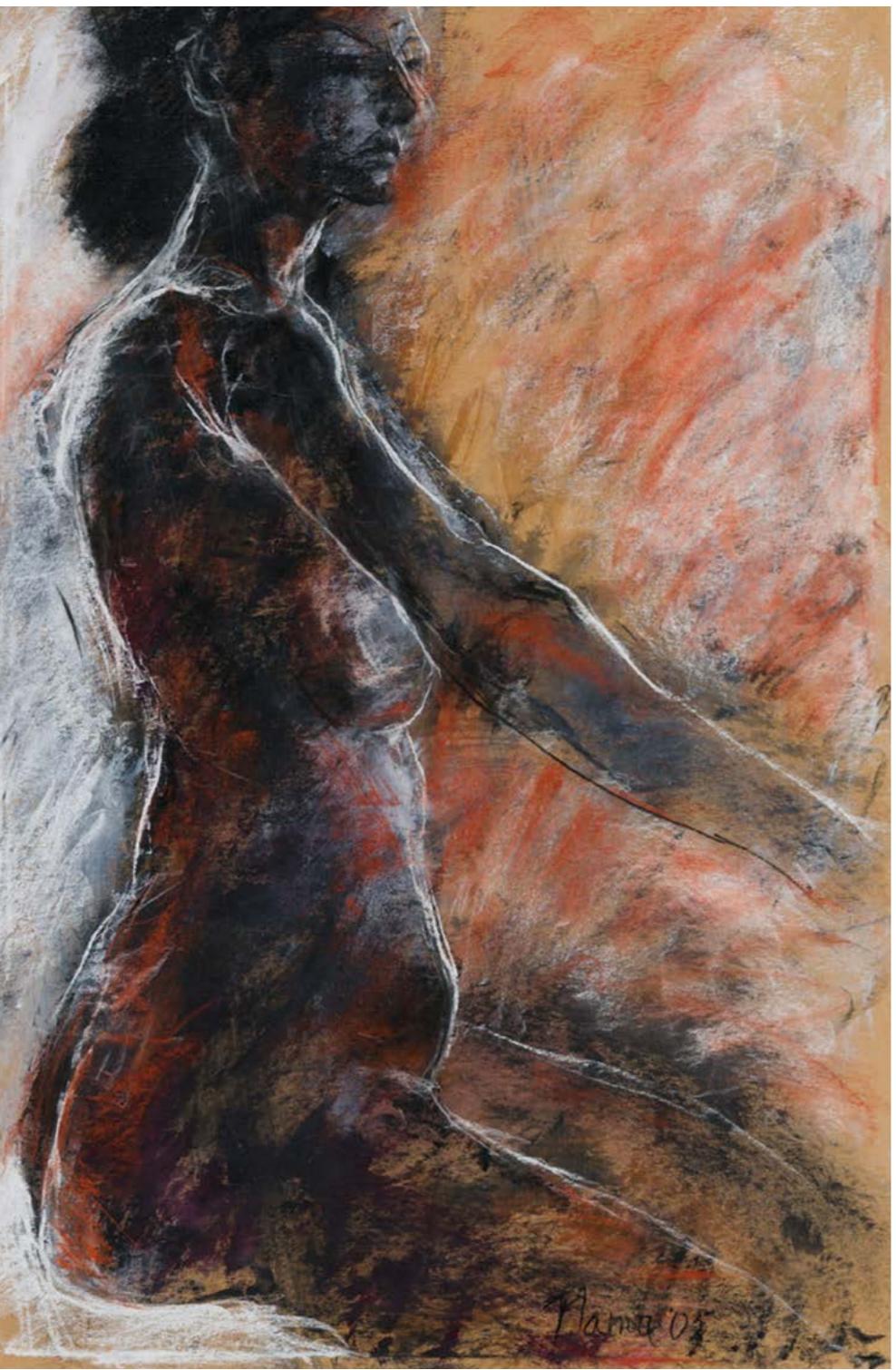


Nama '04, 2004. Ink on paper, 114.5 x 84 cm (Framed)

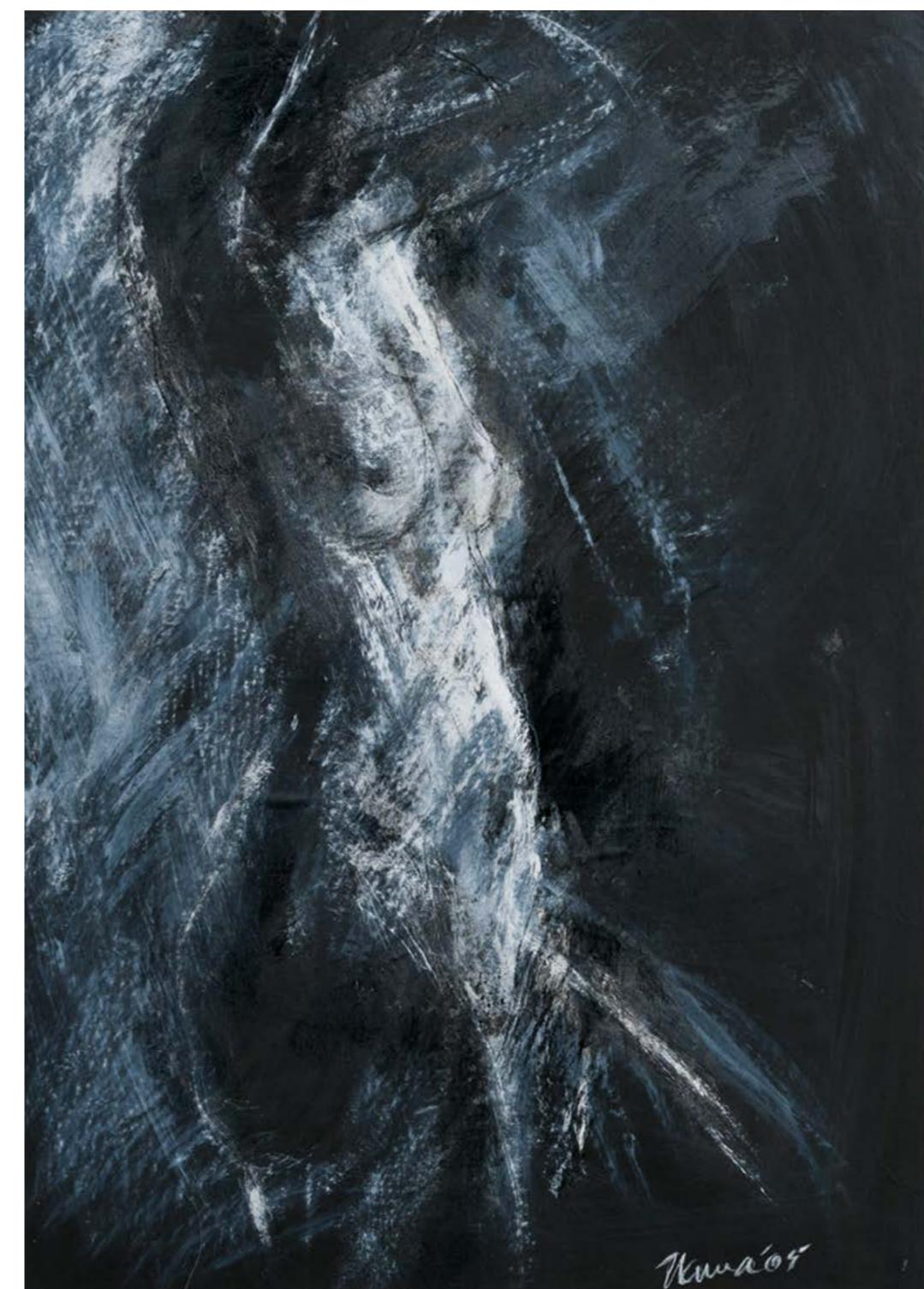


Nama '05, 2005, Pastel on black paper, 106 x 81 cm (Framed)

Nama '05, 2005, Pastel on paper, 110 x 81.5 cm (Framed)

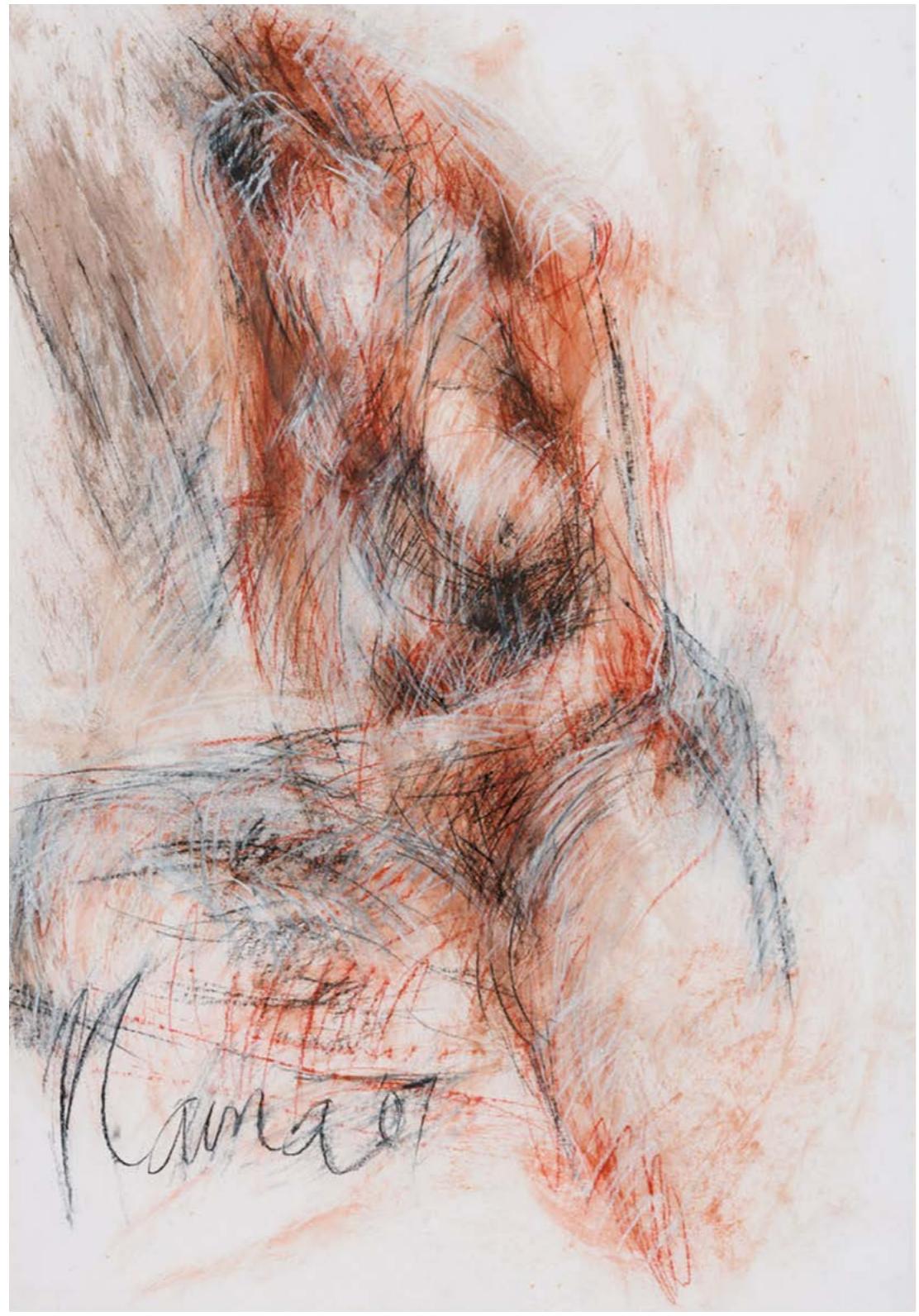


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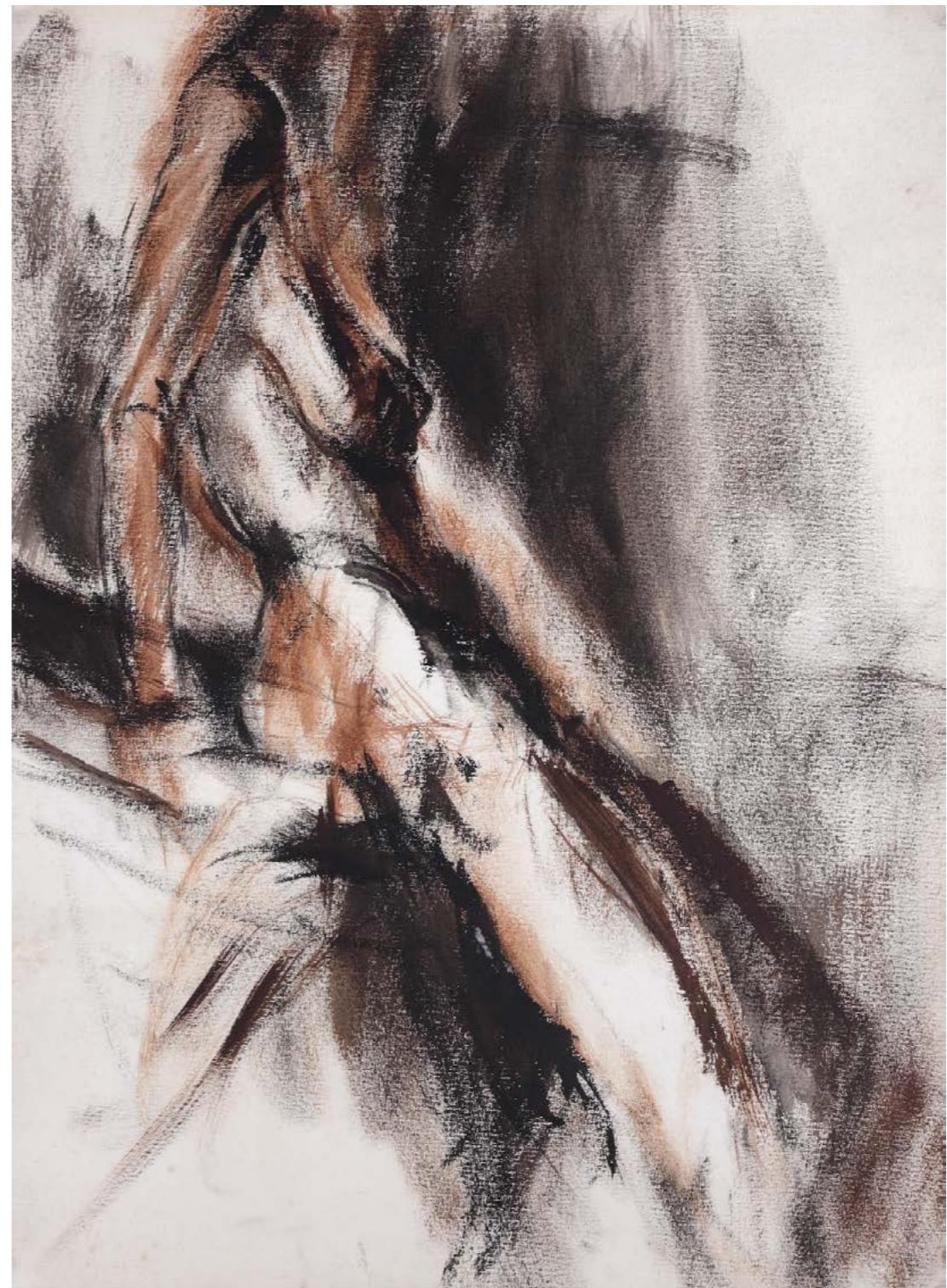


Youth, 2005, Gouache on paper, 106 x 81 cm (Framed)

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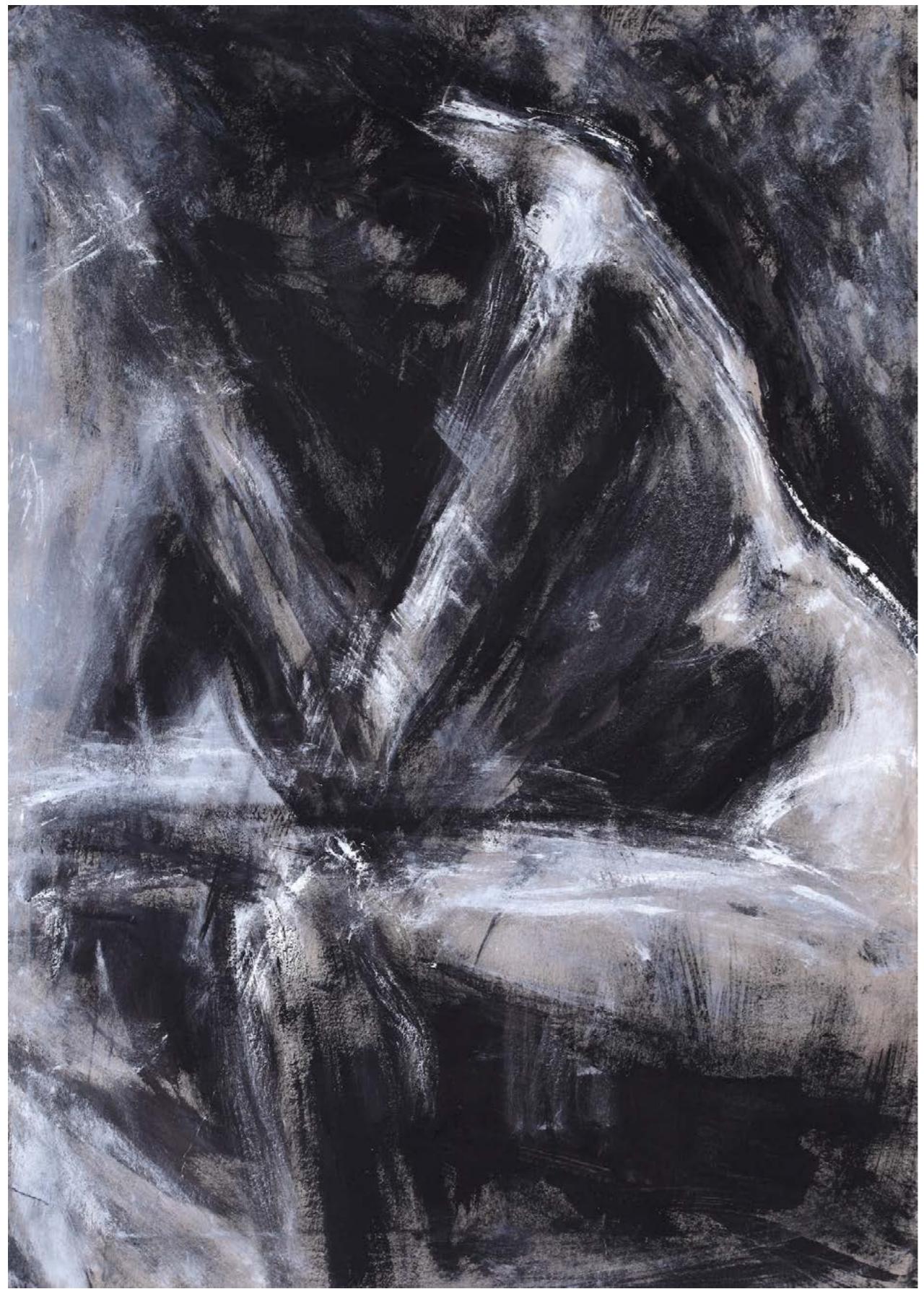


Nama '07, 2007. Pastel on paper, 82.5 x 58 cm

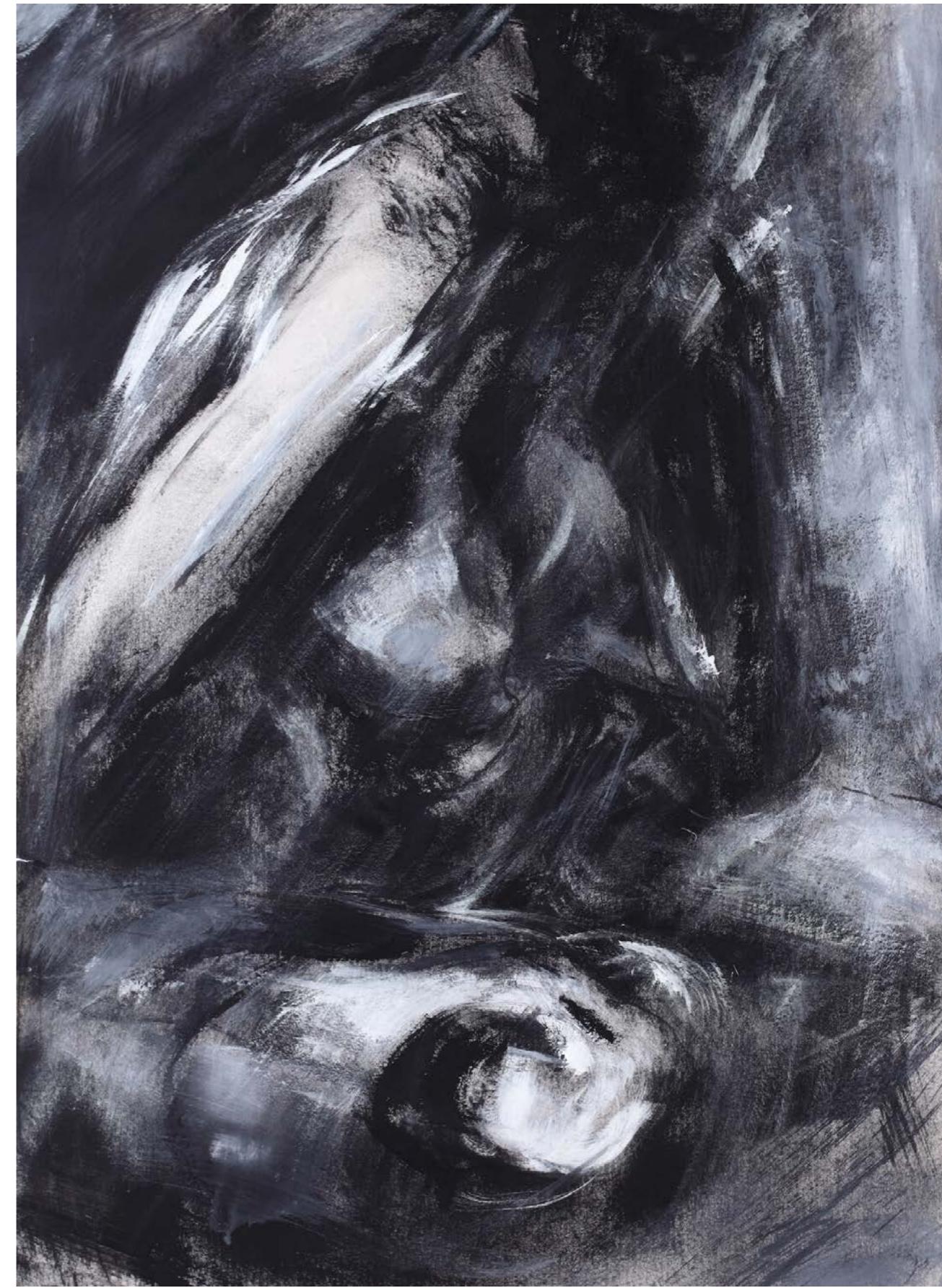


Untitled. Undated. Pastel and charcoal on paper, 82.5 x 58 cm

Untitled. Undated. Ink and pastel on paper, 83.5 x 59 cm



Untitled. Undated. White pastel and charcoal on paper, 76 x 56 cm



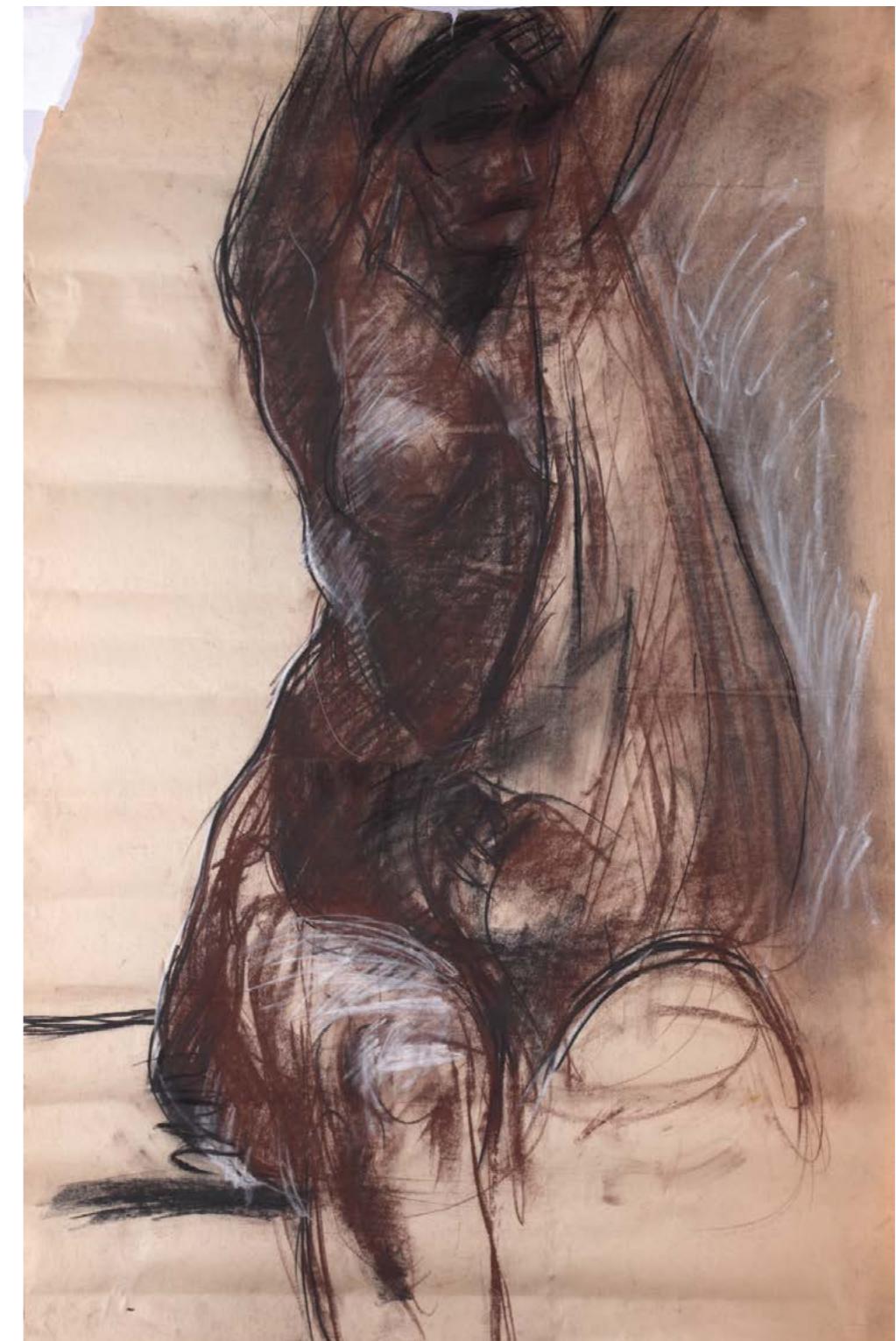
Untitled. Undated. Charcoal and pastel on paper, 89 x 120 cm



Untitled. Undated. Charcoal and pastel on paper, 89 x 119 cm



Untitled. Undated. Charcoal and pastel on paper, 89 x 119 cm



Untitled. Undated. Pastel and charcoal on paper, 90 x 61 cm

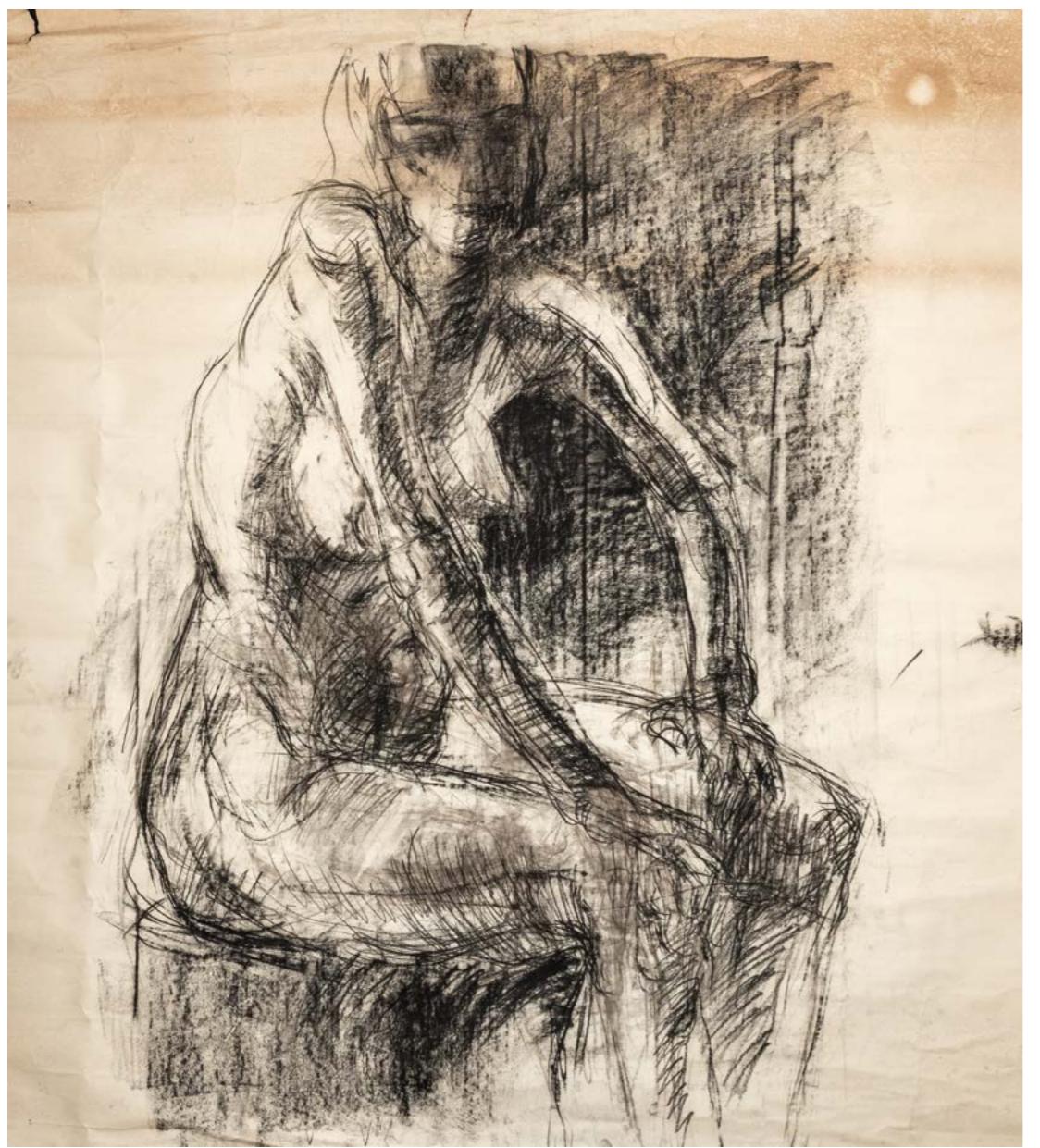
Untitled. Undated. Charcoal and pastel on paper, 89 x 120 cm



Rearview Female Nude to be Corrected, c. 1997. Pastel and gouache on paper, 91 x 119 cm



Seated Female Nude Charcoal. Undated. Charcoal on paper, 85.5 x 86 cm



Untitled. Undated. Charcoal and pastel on paper, 109 x 78.5 cm



Reclining Nude '99. 1999. Charcoal on paper, 86 x 86 cm



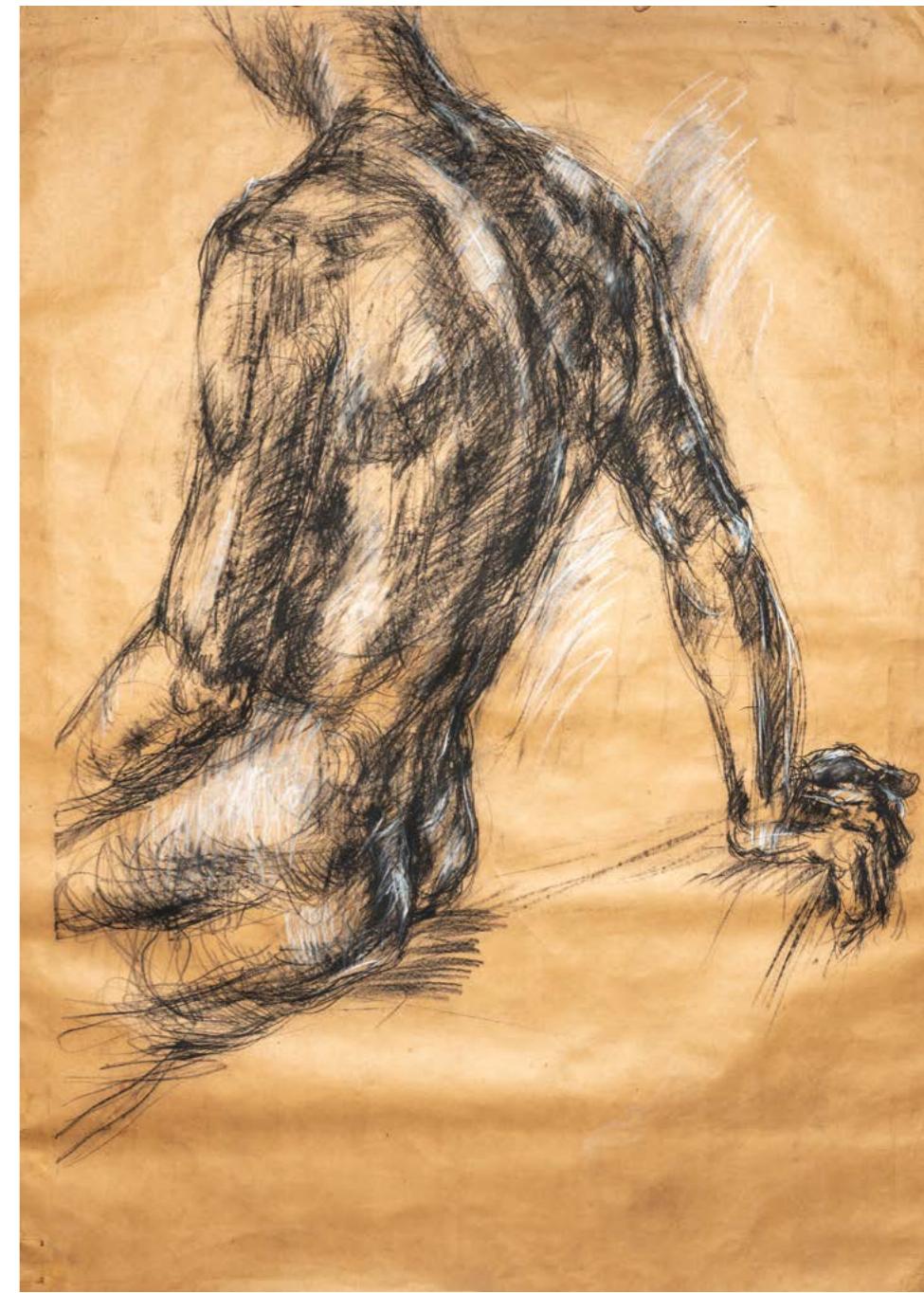
Untitled. Undated. Pastel on paper, 91 x 61 cm



Untitled. Undated. Charcoal on paper, 76 x 55.5 cm



Untitled. Undated. Charcoal on paper, 119 x 89 cm



Untitled. Undated. Charcoal on paper, 70 x 50 cm

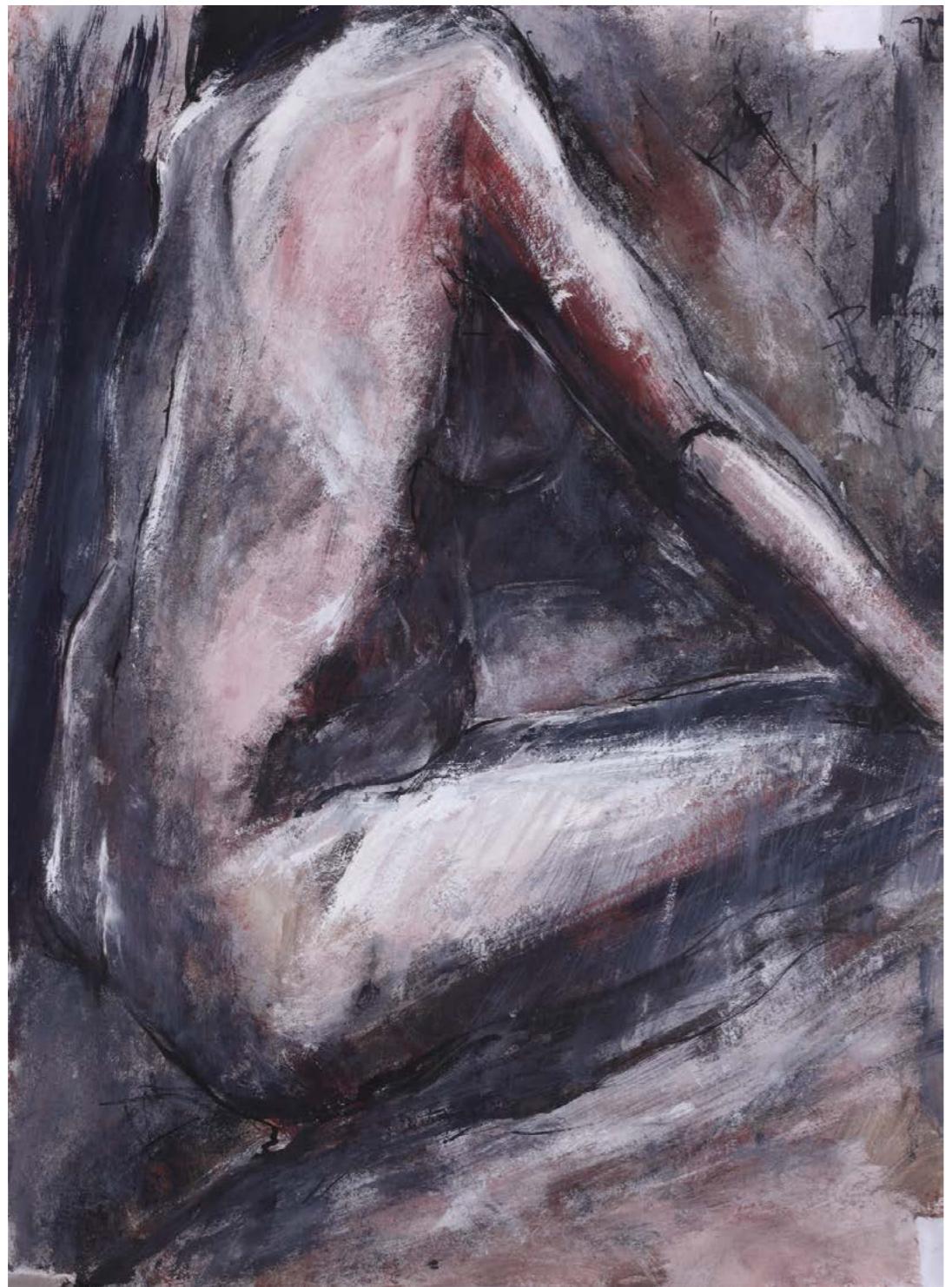


Untitled. Undated. Charcoal on paper, 102 x 74 cm



Top *Untitled.* Undated. Charcoal on paper, 102 x 71 cm
Bottom Left *Untitled.* Undated. Graphite on paper, 100.5 x 70 cm





Nude Sitting (From back view). Undated. Gouache and pastel on paper, 77 x 56 cm



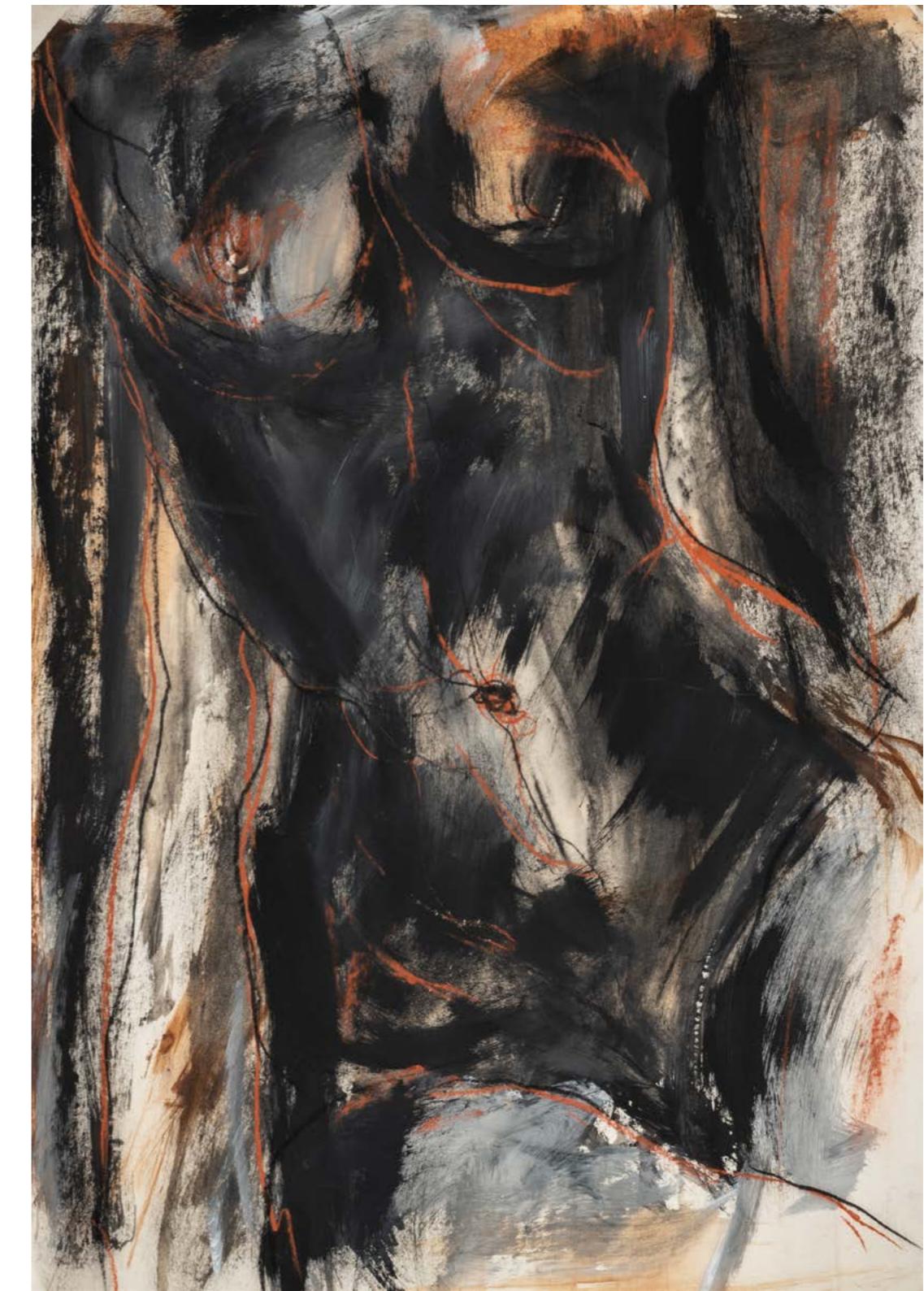
Untitled. Undated. Pastel and charcoal on paper, 119 x 89.5 cm



Untitled. Undated. Watercolour on paper, 70 x 83 cm



Untitled. Undated. Watercolour on paper, 41 x 32.5 cm



Left *Untitled*. Undated. Gouache, ink, and pastel on paper, 119 x 89 cm

Above *Untitled*. Undated. Gouache, ink, and pastel on paper, 59.5 x 41.5 cm

Untitled. Undated. Ink on paper, 57 x 75 cm



Untitled. Undated. Ink and white pastel on paper, 58 x 85 cm



Untitled. Undated. Ink on paper, 57 x 75 cm

Untitled. Undated. Ink on paper, 60 x 42 cm



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Untitled. Undated. Ink and charcoal on paper, 84 x 59.5 cm

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Untitled, c. 2004. Ink on paper, 84 x 61 cm



Untitled. Undated. Ink on paper, 58 x 85 cm





Untitled. Undated. Charcoal and pastel on paper, 50.5 x 68 cm



Untitled. Undated. Charcoal on paper, 90 x 62cm

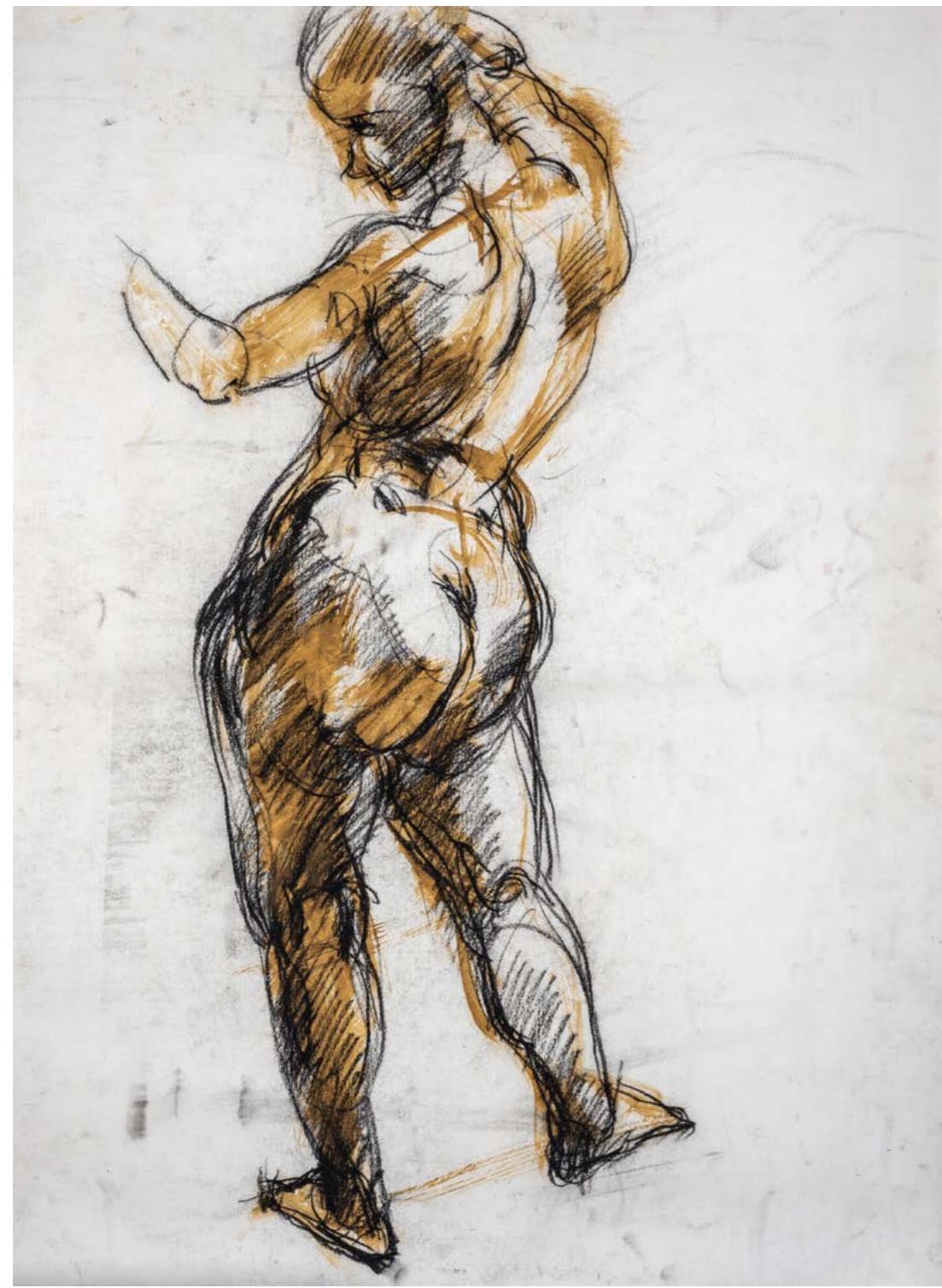


Untitled. Undated. Charcoal on paper, 61 x 91.5 cm

Untitled. Undated. Charcoal on paper, 91 x 61 cm



Untitled. Undated. Charcoal and pastel on paper, 76.5 x 56.5 cm



Untitled. Undated. Pastel and charcoal on paper, 61 x 91 cm





Untitled. Undated. Charcoal and pastel on paper, 75.5 x 55.5 cm



Untitled. Undated. Charcoal on paper, 61 x 90 cm



Untitled. Undated. Charcoal and pastel on paper, 100 x 70 cm



Untitled. Undated. Ink on paper, 61 x 90 cm

Untitled. Undated. Ink and pastel on paper, 76 x 55 cm



Untitled. Undated. Ink and pastel on paper, 109 x 79 cm



Untitled. Undated. Ink and pastel on paper, 86 x 86 cm



Untitled. Undated. Ink and gouache on paper, 86.5 x 86.5 cm



Untitled. Undated. Charcoal and pastel on paper, 86 x 86 cm



Untitled. Undated. Ink on paper, 50 x 70 cm



Untitled. Undated. Ink on paper, 56.5 x 75.5 cm



Untitled. Undated. Charcoal on paper, 91 x 61 cm



Untitled. Undated. Charcoal and pastel on paper, 91.5 x 60 cm



Untitled. Undated. Pastel on paper, 91 x 61 cm



Untitled. Undated. Charcoal on paper, 91 x 61 cm



Untitled. Undated. Charcoal on paper, 101.5 x 71 cm



Untitled. Undated. Charcoal on paper, 61 x 91 cm



Untitled. Undated. Charcoal on paper, 91 x 61 cm



Untitled. Undated. Charcoal on paper, 91 x 61 cm





Untitled. Undated. Charcoal on paper, 91 x 61 cm



Top *Untitled*. c. 2004. Ink and charcoal on paper, 83.5 x 60 cm
Bottom Left *Untitled*. Undated. Charcoal on paper, 91 x 61 cm
Bottom Right *Untitled*. Undated. Charcoal on paper, 91 x 61 cm



Untitled. Undated. Charcoal on paper, 91 x 61 cm





Untitled. Undated. Ink on paper, 74.5 x 56 cm



Untitled. Undated. Pastel on paper, 91 x 61 cm

Untitled. Undated. Charcoal on paper, 61 x 91 cm



Untitled. Undated. Pastel on paper, 61 x 91 cm



Untitled. Undated. Ink on paper, 84 x 59 cm



Untitled. Undated. Ink on paper, 63 x 50 cm

"THE SIMPLEST APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF ANATOMY IS TO TAKE SECTIONS OF THE BODY SEPARATELY AND STUDY THEM."

"THE MOST EXCITING ASPECT OF VOLUME IS ITS USE AS A FORCEFULLY REPRESSIVE TOOL. YOUR ATTITUDE AS AN ARTIST, YOUR INTELLECTUAL AND EMOTIONAL RESPONSES ARE THE PRIMARY DETERMINANT OF HOW YOU USE VOLUME. ACTUAL APPEARANCES CAN BE SUBORDINATED TO EXPRESSIVE INTERESTS."

Sketchbooks

SKETCHBOOK 1

Description: Red cover. 1957-1960s.
Dimensions: 8.07 in x 4.92 in
Content includes: Learning and reading about art history, few sketches of contemporary Singaporean life, ducks and boats, aeroplanes, portraits and figures, perspective of building indoors, street scenes, feet and hands, abstract compositions, flowers and leaves.

SKETCHBOOK 2

Description: Fragile, red cover. Late 1950s.
Dimensions: 8.07 in x 4.92 in
Content includes: Landscape and compositional studies, observations of contemporary Singaporean life, women with vases, abstract shapes and compositions.

SKETCHBOOK 3

Description: Grey cover, fragile. Starts Feb 1960.
Dimensions: 8.07 in x 4.92 in
Notes on material and drawing terms, abstract studies, horseracing, figures, notes on anatomy and proportions, notes on colours for a proposed silk print (dated).

SKETCHBOOK 4

Description: Practical Note Book. 1972.
Dimensions: 9.25 in x 10.55 in
Content includes: Drawings, some signed and/or dated, and landscapes in watercolour, ink and pen.

SKETCHBOOK 5

Description: Academie Sketch Diary. 1986.
Dimensions: 11 in x 8.5 in
Content includes: People on the street, landscapes in ink, pen and watercolours, figures and portraits in marker, loose leaf page of a colourful vase, the Cameron Highlands.

SKETCHBOOK 6

Description: The Lyndhurst Cartridge Sketchbook. 1987.
Dimensions: 10 in x 7 in
Content includes: Sketches of scenes and places in the city (including Cavanagh Bridge, Bras Basah Park Raffles City and Tanjong Pagar Railway Station), loose outlines of crowds and people observed, caricature of a man.

SKETCHBOOK 7

Description: The Lyndhurst Cartridge Sketchbook. 1987.
Dimensions: 7 in x 5 in
Content includes: Sketches of Mudbank Potain, animals in the zoo and figures on the street, colourful study of the Veeramakaliamman Temple and other historical sites in Singapore.

SKETCHBOOK 8

Description: Mead Academie Sketch Diary. 1987.
Dimensions: 11 in x 8.5 in
Content includes: Studies of animals in the zoo, sketches and watercolour paintings of parks in Singapore, charcoal sketches of shophouses. Dated.

SKETCHBOOK 9

Description: Green unlabeled sketchbook. 1987.
Dimensions: 30 cm x 21 cm
Content includes: Studies of trees in Fort Canning Park and Mount Emily Park, sketches of Serangoon Road, studies in pen of nude figures. Dated.

SKETCHBOOK 10

Description: The Langton Watercolour Book. 1988.
Dimensions: 7 in x 5 in
Content includes: Watercolour paintings of landscapes including forests, oceans and lakes.

SKETCHBOOK 11

Description: Tulip Sketch. 1988.
Dimensions: 25.5 cm x 17.7 cm
Content includes: Studies of tree trunks, sketches of a jetty, sketches of buildings and people on streets. Dated.

SKETCHBOOK 12

Description: The Lyndhurst Cartridge Sketchbook. 1988-1989.
Dimensions: 10 in x 7 in.
Content includes: Watercolour landscapes of MacRitchie, people at the sea, kampong houses, a sketch of Nama by artist Chew Yew Seng (dated 1988).

SKETCHBOOK 13

Description: The Lyndhurst Cartridge Sketchbook. 1988 – 1989.
Dimensions: 7 in x 5 in
Content includes: Sketches of buildings, trees and people on streets. Places include shops at Sungie street and Chinese temple. Dated.

SKETCHBOOK 14

Description: Pentalic Artist's Sketchbook, signed and dated with 'Paul Cezanne' written in pen. 1990.
Dimensions: 5.75 in x 8.5 in
Content includes: Observation sketches of nude and dressed figures, studies of faces in pen, charcoal sketches of the riverside, scribbly abstract charcoal sketches, notes on facial anatomy, self-portrait studies in charcoal, annotated charcoal and pencil sketches of nude figures, notes, charcoal sketch of skull, study of white highlights on charcoal, studies of nude figures in ink, quote by Egon Schiele, studies of faces and scenes using ovoids, studies of figures with green and red paint, list of names and dates. Dated.

SKETCHBOOK 15

Description: Blue hardcover sketchbook with black spine. 1991.
Dimensions: 5.38 in x 8.86 in
Streets and landscapes in ink and charcoal. Places such as Nanyang campus, Shenton Way and Albert Street, notes on anatomy, 10-day observation of birds.

SKETCHBOOK 16

Description: Small black hardcover sketchbook from Nama's time in the UK. Brown pages. 1991.
Dimensions: 4.25 in x 6 in
Content includes: Pen sketches of landscapes, figures and street scenes including Regent Bank in London and Avignon Palais.

SKETCHBOOK 17

Description: A4 black hardcover, signed with his name on the front. 1993
Dimensions: 8.27 in x 11.69 in
Content includes: Ink sketches and observation drawings - portraits, figures, landscapes of early 90s Singapore, many dated.

SKETCHBOOK 18

Description: Van Gogh Drawing Pad. 1997.
Dimensions: 5.75 in x 8.25 in
Content includes: Sketches of buildings and scenes in pen, observational studies of heads in pen, sketches of individuals in Little India, annotated anatomical sketches in charcoal and pen, list of works with medium, dimensions and replica sketches, writings on creativity and reading list, studies of landscapes in charcoal and watercolour, notes on tonal changes, list of names, dates and amounts of money. Dated.

SKETCHBOOK 19

Description: Black hardcover landscape orientation sketchbook. 2001.
Dimensions: 8.27 in x 11.69 in
Content includes: Nude figures in charcoal, ink, graphite and pastel.

SKETCHBOOK 20

Description: Daley Rowley Full Pad. 2001.
Dimensions: 8.27 in x 11.69 in
Content includes: Ink and charcoal observation sketches of nude figures, labelled anatomical drawings.

SKETCHBOOK 21

Description: Dolphin Exercise Book. LASALLE College of arts Notes AEP. 31st July 2002.
Dimensions: 8.27 in x 11.69 in
Content includes: Notes for AEP LASALLE COLLEGE OF THE ARTS.

SKETCHBOOK 22

Description: A4 sized ring bind black sketchbook. 2003 – 2004.
Dimensions: 8.27 in x 11.69 in
Content includes: Charcoal, graphite, ink, acrylic and pastel sketches and studies of the female nude, progressions and different expressions of the same pose indicative of artistic development, "Figurative Expression" written in ink.

SKETCHBOOK 23

Description: Small black hardcover sketchbook. 2005.
Dimensions: 4.33 in x 6.29 in
Content includes: Observational portraits, landscapes and nude sketches.

SKETCHBOOK 24

Description: Black hardcover spiral-bound notebook. 2005-2006.
Dimensions: 8.27 in x 11.69 in
Content includes: Watercolour and ink scenes and landscapes of Singapore, dated.

SKETCHBOOK 25

Description: Small black ring-bound sketchbook.
Dated '06 at the front.
Dimensions 4.13 in x 5.83 in
Content includes: Ink and charcoal sketches of landscapes (including Boat Quay, Clifford Pier and Maxwell Road), figures and still life. A reference to artist Salvador Dali.

SKETCHBOOK 26

Description: A4 black sketchbook (Croquis). 2006.
Dimensions: 8.27 in x 11.69 in
Content includes: Mostly skeletal, anatomical and figurative sketches and studies, labelled drawings of muscles, a watercolour study of Marina Bay.

SKETCHBOOK 27

Description: Black sketchbook, pieces of glassine paper in between. 2008 signed in the front.
Dimensions: 5.83 in x 8.27 in
Content includes: Drawings in charcoal, pastel, ink, graphite and marker, series of brown anatomical drawings, gestural poses. Many signed.

SKETCHBOOK 28

Description: Black [etcetera] sketchbook. 2008.
Dimensions: 7.28 in x 9.13 in
Content includes: Figure studies in charcoal, graphite, and pastel, pen and watercolours.

SKETCHBOOK 29

Description: Black sketchbook. Dated works from 2010 – 2012.
Dimensions: 5.83 in x 8.27 in
Content includes: Sketches of nude figures in charcoal, ink, pastel and watercolour.

SKETCHBOOK 30

Description: Fragile, brownish cover. Undated.
Dimensions: 8.07 in x 4.92 in
Content includes: References to modern painting (e.g. Pierre Bonnard), colour charts, portraits of people, dogs, street scenes.

SKETCHBOOK 31

Description: Green Sir Stamford Raffles exercise note book. General notes on Anatomy. Undated.
Dimensions: 6.5 in x 8.27 in
Content includes: Lecture notes on anatomy.

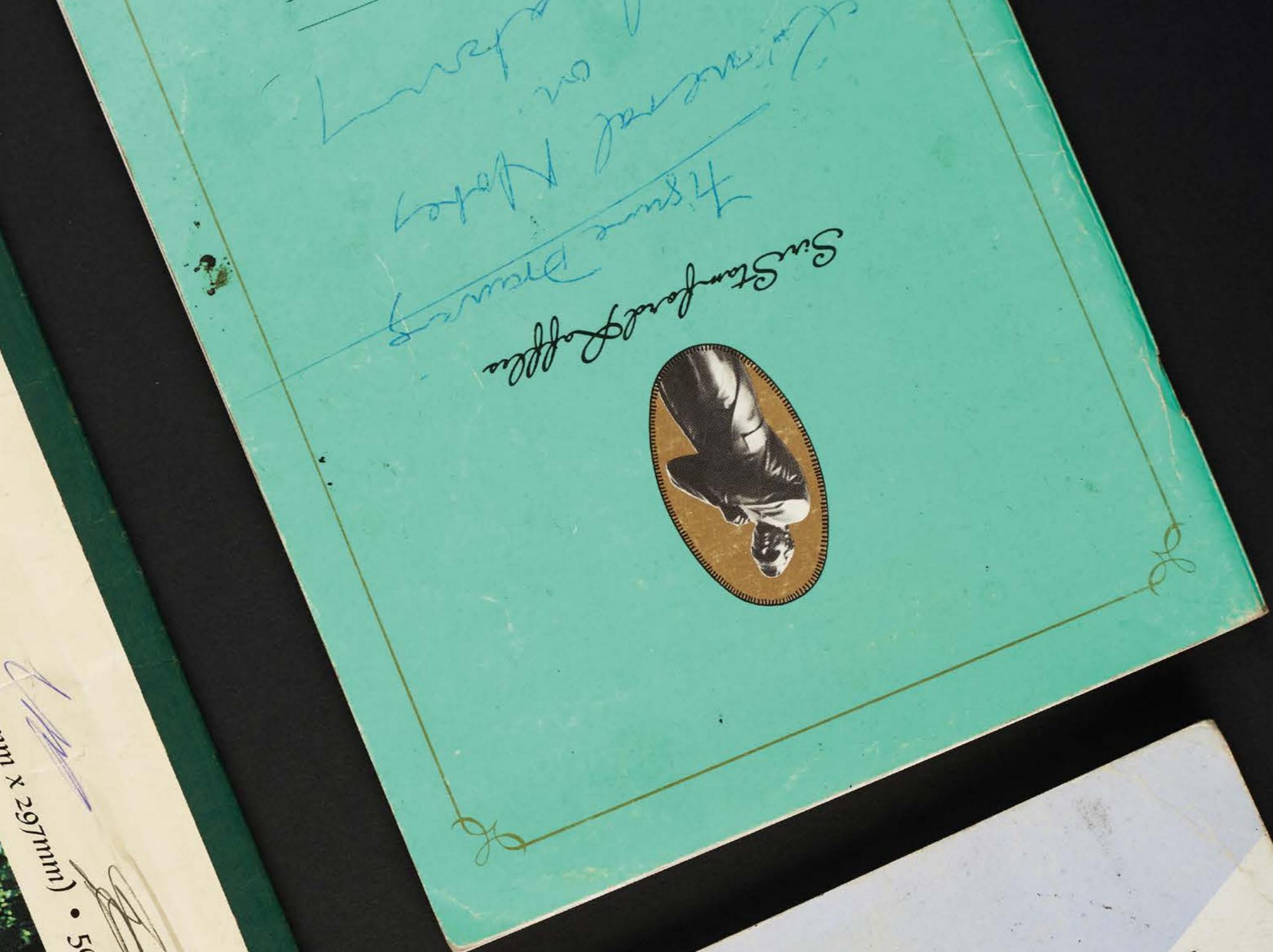
SKETCHBOOK 32

Description: Examination Pad. Undated.
Dimensions: 8.27 in x 11.69 in
Content includes: Note on the skeleton.

SKETCHBOOK 33

Description: Bestform Memo Pad. Undated.
Dimensions: 8.27 in x 6 in
Content includes: Notes on drawing exercises, people's contact information, cartoons and musings in charcoal.







Sketchbook 1



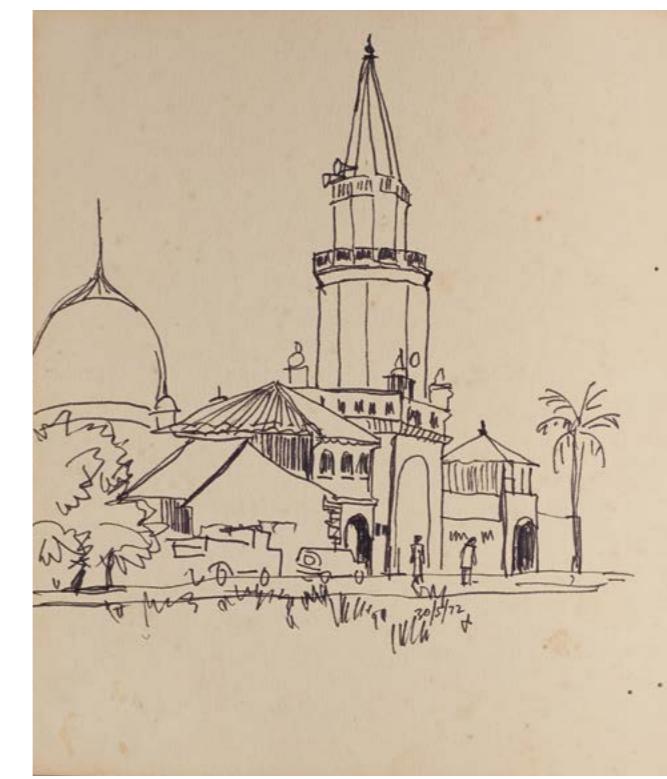
Sketchbook 3



Sketchbook 1



Sketchbook 2



Sketchbook 4



Sketchbook 3



Sketchbook 4



Sketchbook 8



Sketchbook 8



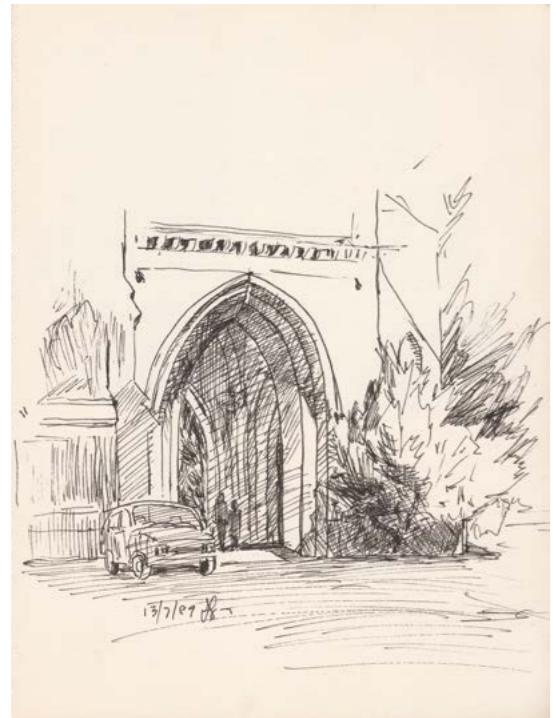
Sketchbook 8



Sketchbook 8



Sketchbook 8



Sketchbook 8



Sketchbook 8



Sketchbook 8



Sketchbook 8



Sketchbook 8



Sketchbook 8



Sketchbook 8



Sketchbook 8

Sketchbook 9

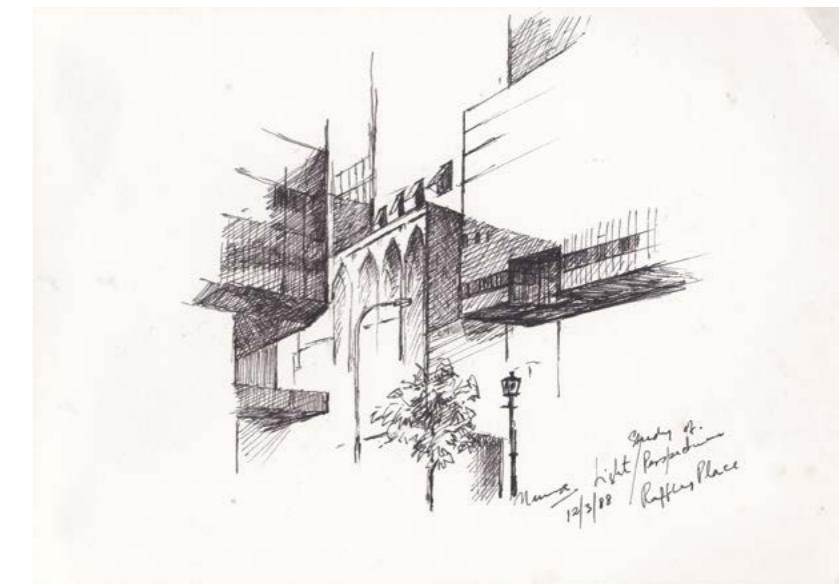


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Sketchbook 29

Sketchbook 11



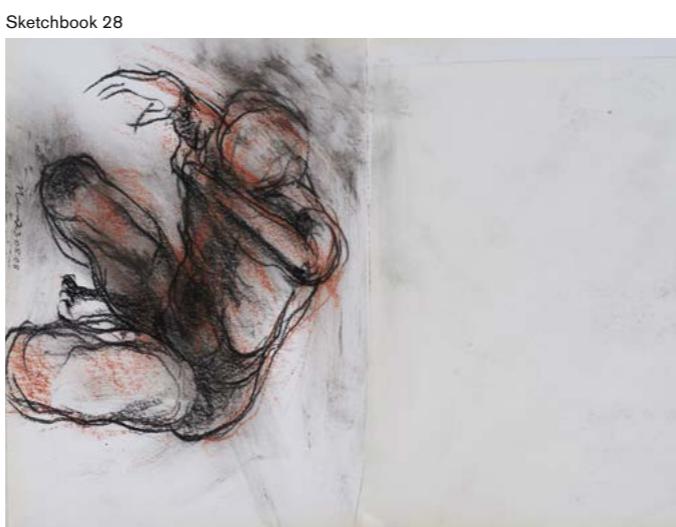
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Sketchbook 25



Sketchbook 19

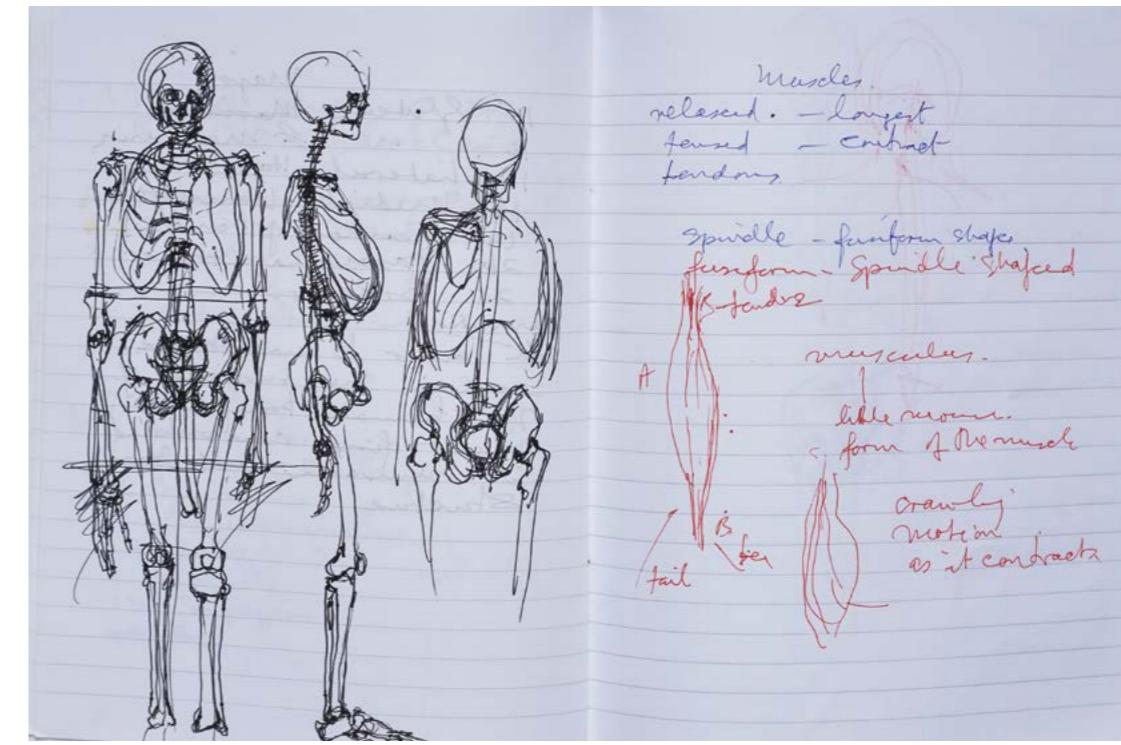
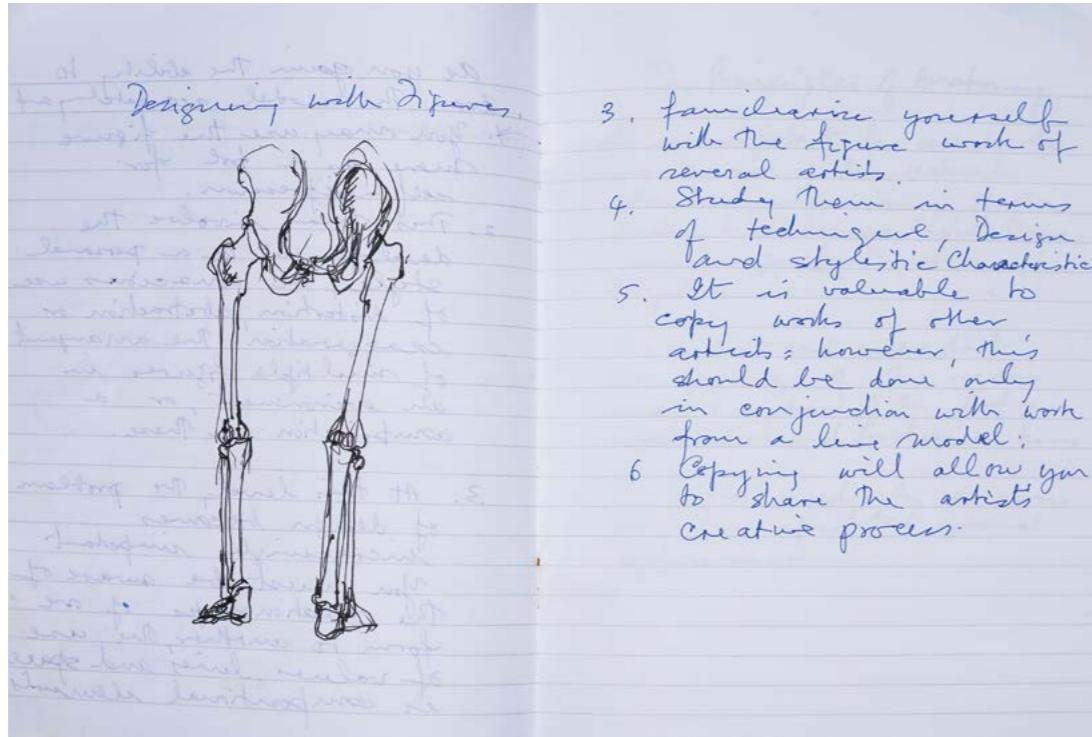


Sketchbook 28



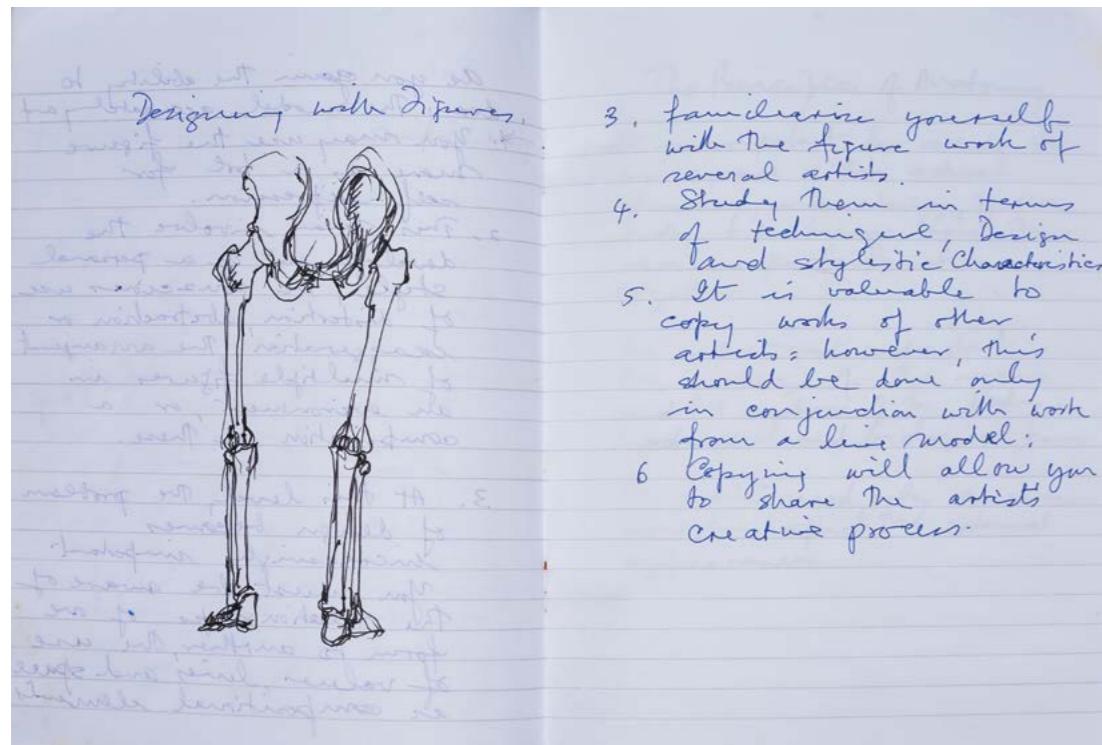
Sketchbook 19

Sketchbook 31

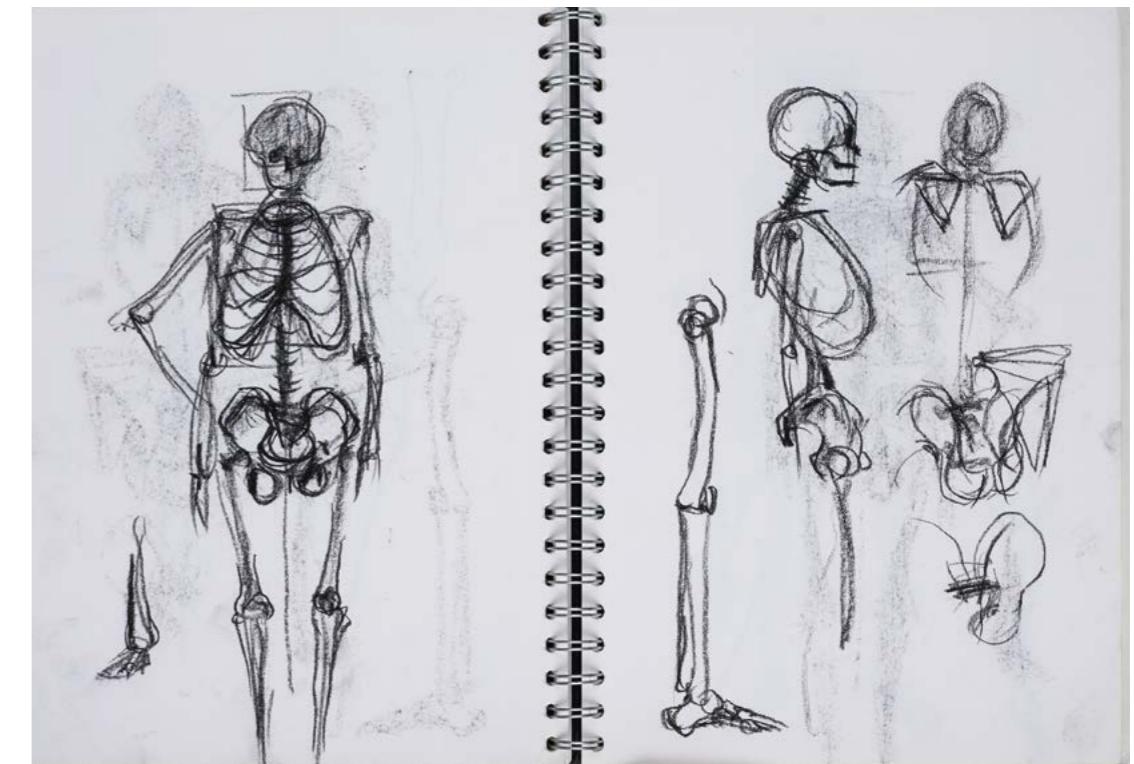


Sketchbook 31

Sketchbook 31



Sketchbook 24





Sketchbook 13



Sketchbook 13



234



235



Sketchbook 7



Sketchbook 7

Sketchbook 7



236

Sketchbook 7



237

“DRAWING WAS FUNDAMENTAL TO ALL ART.
WITHOUT DRAWING, ART IS ZERO.”

Timeline

“I AM DOING THE KIND OF JOB THAT IS
RIGHT IN THE CORE OF MY HEART.”

→ THE BIRTH OF SOLAMALAY NAMASIVAYAM
1926

Solamalay Namasivayam was born into a respectable landowning family on 6th May 1926 in Madurai, South India. He was the eldest of nine children.

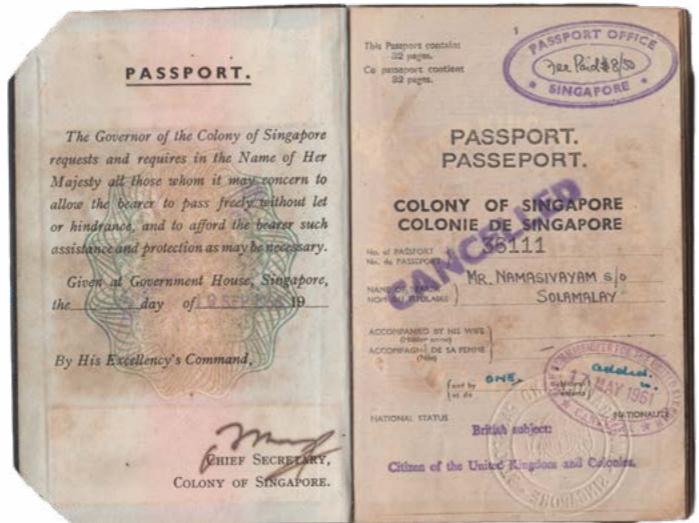


The infant Nama posed on a tricycle, early 1920s.

→ ARRIVAL IN BRITISH MALAYA
1931

He arrived with his mother in British Malaya (as it was then known) at the age of five to join his father, who was a foreman-mechanic at the Central Electricity Board in Kuala Lumpur (KL). He attended a private primary school in Brickfields, KL, run by the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA).

He was then transferred to a government primary school at Batu Road, KL, after being recommended by a British engineer working with the Board, who spotted potential in him. It was here that the young Namasivayam first discovered his love for art, aided and nurtured by the encouragement of his teachers, who quickly noticed his natural aptitude for the subject.



Nama's British Malayan passport, issued in September 1956.

→ SECONDARY EDUCATION DISRUPTED BY WORLD WAR II
1939 – 1947

In 1939, Namasivayam enrolled at KL's Victoria Institution (VI), a premier boys' school, for his secondary education. From 1942 to 1946, his education was disrupted by World War II.

In 1947, following the end of World War II, he resumed his studies at VI and was able to complete his Senior Cambridge Education. He was taught art and focused mainly on studying still-life drawing as well as imaginative composition.



Young Nama painting on his desk.



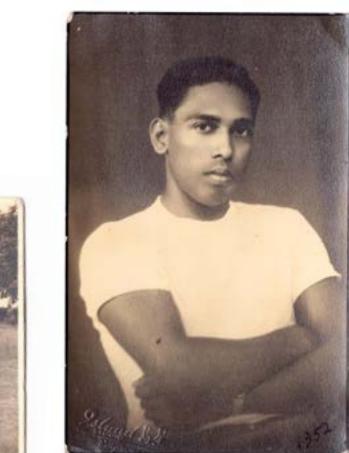
Senior Cambridge boys at Victoria Institution, Kuala Lumpur, 1948. Nama stands on the third row, fourth from the left.

→ RECEIVED TEACHER'S TRAINING DIPLOMA
1950 – 1956

He relocated to Singapore and received his National Training Diploma in Teaching from Singapore's Teachers' Training College. Following this, he became a primary school teacher who taught various subjects at a number of different schools. During this time, he was a member of the Singapore Art Society (SAS). From 1955 to 1956, he took part in the exhibitions presented by the SAS.



(Top Left) Wartime friends reunite. G. Ramani (seated), Narayanasamy & Nama. Kuala Lumpur, 1951.



(Top Right & Bottom Left) Outdoor Drawing Class, Singapore. Nama stands posing with his students. Mid-1950s.

(Bottom Right) A young Nama in his 20s. Early 1950s.

→ RECEIVED COLOMBO PLAN SCHOLARSHIP TO
STUDY FINE ARTS IN SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA
1957 – 1961

After getting a place in the Colombo Plan Scholarship programme, he travelled to Sydney, Australia in 1957 together with pioneer artist Mr Sim Thong Khern, studying Fine Arts. There he received academic training and was introduced to "discipline drawing", a process which required him to learn how to draw figures from plaster casts of Greek statues. This was a more formal and traditional type of training. He graduated from East Sydney Technical College, majoring in Figure Drawing and Painting. He returned to Singapore in 1961 after the completion of his studies.



With Suri Bin Moyani (middle), co-founder of 'Singapore Art Society' and Sim Thong Khern (left).



Nama and his young bride Mdm Lakshmi enjoying the scenic panorama over the Three Sisters, Blue Mountains, New South Wales, Australia, 1959.

→ TAUGHT ENGLISH, MATH AND ART IN
VARIOUS SCHOOLS
1961 – 1962

Namasivayam became a secondary school teacher and taught English, Maths and Art. He taught at various schools including Gan Eng Seng.



Senior Media Advisors of SEMS (Senior Education Media Services, a unit within the Ministry of Education MOE), featuring Nama, Paul Seow (first from left), Peter Seow (second from left), Woon Ho Thye (third from the left), Koh Joo Leng (fourth from the left), and Tan See Lai (third from the right). Circa late 70s - early 80s.

→ TAUGHT ART AT NATIONAL INSTITUTE
OF EDUCATION
1962 – 1978

He was later head-hunted to be a lecturer at the Singapore Teachers Training College (TTC), now known as the National Institute of Education (NIE), to pass on his knowledge to trainee teachers in general, and art teachers in particular. He worked at TTC until 1978 and taught art privately at the Adult Education Board.



Old Teachers Training College, Paterson Road. Circa early 80s.

→ PIONEER PRODUCER AND PRESENTER
1967 TIL MID 1970S

He was a pioneer producer and presenter on Educational Television (ETV) programmes. He produced at TTC's Paterson Road studios, which were broadcasted nationwide via Radio Television Singapore (RTS), the precursor to Mediacorp. His episodes featured lectures on various subjects including Art techniques and Art History.

In 1974, ETV was renamed the Singapore Education Media Service (SEMS), which was merged in 1980 into the newly established Curriculum Development Institute of Singapore (CDIS), a policy department within the Ministry of Education.



Nama preparing an ETV radio broadcast with sound engineer, mid-1980s.



Nama receiving an MOE-sponsored audio-visual course award from a Kodak Film Company representative, late 1970s.

→ BECAME A SENIOR MEDIA ADVISOR AT AUDIO
VISUAL DEPARTMENT AT MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
1981 – 1985

He worked for the Singapore Education Media and became a Media Specialist, serving as a Senior Media Advisor (Lecturer and Media Specialist), SEMS/CDIS, Ministry of Education (MOE) until his departure in 1981, at the age of 55. He subsequently taught mathematics at Ang Mo Kio Vocational Institution and he worked there until he retired at the age of 60.



Nama at his office table, Ministry of Education, early 1980s.



Chia Wai Hon and Nama in a classroom setting.

→ LECTURER IN FINE ART AND SPECIALIST
LECTURER IN FIGURE DRAWING, LASALLE-
SIA COLLEGE OF THE ARTS
1987 – 2001

In 1987, he displayed his portfolio during his job interview with Brother McNally and subsequently taught art for the first time at LASALLE College of the Arts. He became a lecturer in Fine Art and a Specialist Lecturer in Figure Drawing, Lasalle-SIA College of the Arts.

During his tenure there, he started a new figure drawing department and introduced 'Life Drawing' as a specific specialist subject into its Fine Arts curriculum in 1987. He became a full time lecturer from 1989 – 1990 and was appointed as the Head of the Fine Arts Department during that period, but left temporarily in 1990. In 1992, he resumed teaching at LASALLE, formulating his own syllabus after being persuaded to do so by Mr Loh Khee Yew, who was a fellow member of Group 90.

→ THE FOUNDING OF GROUP 90
C. 1987

In 1987, he founded, in close collusion with brother Joseph McNally, Mr Chia Wai Hon and Mr Sim Thong Khern, of the nucleus of what later came to be known as 'Group 90', an elite cohort of dedicated senior luminaries from within Singaporean artists' fraternity, who devoted their time to the interpretive study of the human form.

As word of Group 90 spread through the grapevine, other well-established and highly reputed personalities joined in. They included Liu Kang, Dr Earl Lu, Ng Eng Teng, Loh Khee Yew, Choy Weng Yang and Prof. Roy Calnes, to name but a few.



Outings with Group 90 members, featured with Nama, Ng Eng Teng (bottom left), Chia Wai Hon (third from left), Tan Choo Kuan (third from right).

→ FIRST EXHIBITION OF GROUP 90
1990

In 1990, Namasivayam participated in two exhibitions, The Indian Cultural Exhibition as well as Group 90's first inaugural exhibition titled 'FIGURAMA.' The latter was held at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) Gallery.

FIRST PARTICIPATION OF INDIAN ARTISTS' EXHIBITION
1991

He participated in the 'Indian Artists' Exhibition', which he participated for the very first time.



Exhibition setting, Nama explaining an artwork to a couple.

→ THE FIGURE IN ART EXHIBITION

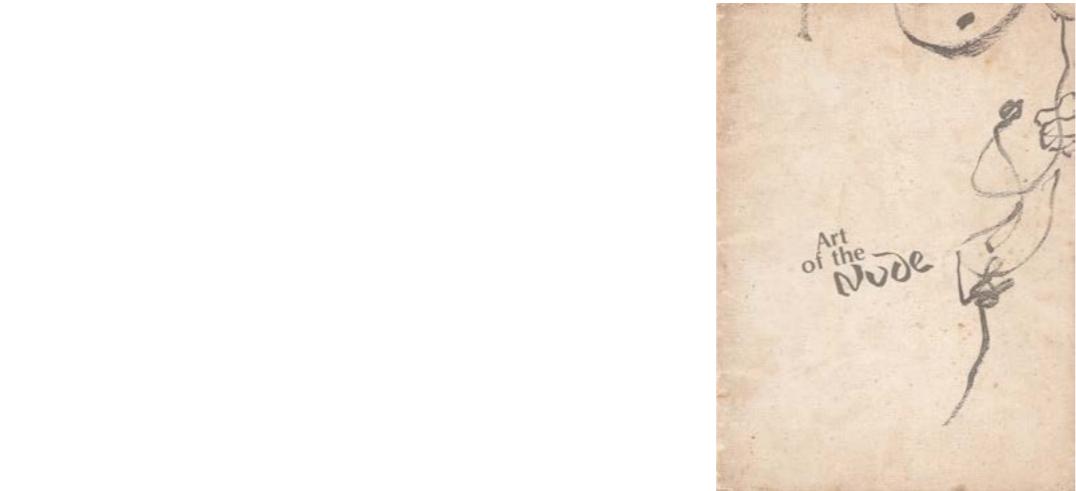
1992

He took part in the Group 90 exhibition and forum entitled 'THE FIGURE IN ART (in the Singapore Context)' that was held at the NAFA Gallery. This exhibition earned the members the title of 'nude masters' by T.K. Sabapathy. He also exhibited his artwork at the 'TEACHERS' ART EXHIBITION 1992', which was organized by the MOE, at the Singapore Conference Hall.

ART IN ASIA EXHIBITION

1993

He participated in the 'ART IN ASIA' exhibition that was held at the World Trade Centre at Harbour Front.



Art of the Nude catalogue, March 1994.



Nama with fellow artists including Liu Kang (middle).

→ ART OF THE NUDE EXHIBITION

1994

He was involved in another Group 90 exhibition entitled 'ART OF THE NUDE', which was held at the NAFA Gallery. This year also marks the first catalogue produced for the Group 90's exhibitions.

NAMASIVAYAM'S FIRST SOLO EXHIBITION

1995

1995 was an important year for the artist. Namasyayam had his first solo exhibition at Mr S. R. Gopal's Security Training Centre at Little India Arcade.

→ IMAGE NUDE EXHIBITION

1998

He took part in Group 90's exhibition titled 'IMAGE NUDE' which was held at Orchard Point Exhibition Hall, 17 - 21 July 1998.

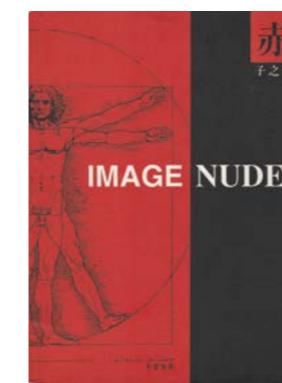


IMAGE NUDE catalogue, July 1998.



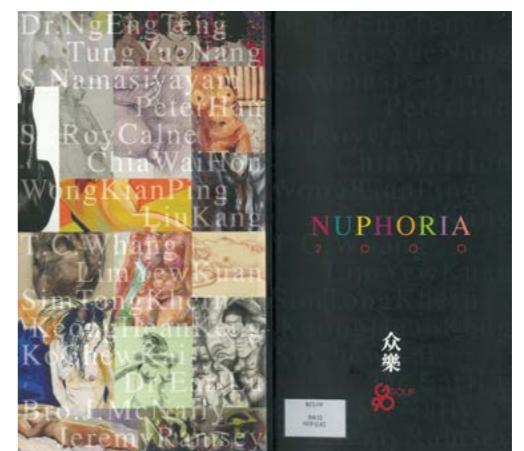
IMAGE NUDE artists, photo taken at Lasalle-SIA-College of the Arts, May 1998.



→ NUPHORIA

2000

He participated in Group 90's exhibition titled 'NUPHORIA 2000' which was held at The Gallery @ PARAGON, Orchard Road, 14 - 19 April 2000.



NUPHORIA 2000 catalogue, April 2000.



Group 90 members, featured with Nama, Liew Choon Kee (first from left), Ko Chew Kai (second from left), Tung Yue Nang (third from left), Sim Thong Khern (fourth from right), Keong Hean Keng (second from right), 1998.

→ NAMASIVAYAM AT THE PINETREE COUNTRY CLUB
2000

Namasivayam exhibits sketches and small drawings at the Pinetree Country Club and they are offered for sale at \$250 - \$600.



Nama at the Pinetree Country Club, 2000.



Featured with Nama at the Pinetree Country Club, Tung Yue Nang (left) and Chia Wai Hon (right), 2000.

NAMA						
No.	TITLE	YEAR	MEDIUM	SIZE	PRICE	REMARKS
1	Honda Temple, Seremban, Raja	1988	Watercolour	21 x 14 cm	\$ 250	
2	Private Edward Road	1988	Watercolour	28 x 20 cm	\$ 380	
3	Kampung Jawa, Batu	1988	Watercolour	21.5 x 20.5 cm	\$ 380	
4	Chinese Temple, Kusu Island	1988	Watercolour	20.5 x 20.5 cm	\$ 380	
5	Sembawang Park	1988	Watercolour	27.5 x 26.5 cm	\$ 380	
6	Night Scene, Sembawang Harbour	1988	Watercolour	27.5 x 26 cm	\$ 280	
7	Rocky, Sembawang Harbour	1990	Watercolour	46 x 31 cm	\$ 380	
8	Rainclouds	1990	Watercolour	46 x 30.5 cm	\$ 380	
9	At Rest #1	1990	Ink & Brush	41 x 30 cm	\$ 300	
10	Reclining Figure	1990	Ink & Wash	41.5 x 30 cm	\$ 300	
11	At Rest #2	1990	Ink & Wash	41 x 30 cm	\$ 200	
12	Seated Figure	1990	Ink & Wash	41 x 30 cm	\$ 400	
13	Figure #1	1990	Ink & Wash	60 x 40 cm	\$ 450	
14	Figure #2	1990	Charcoal	60 x 42 cm	\$ 400	
15	Figure #3	1990	Charcoal	60 x 42 cm	\$ 400	
16	Figure #4	1990	Charcoal	59.5 x 42 cm	\$ 400	
17	Landscape, Figure	1990	Charcoal	60.5 x 45.5 cm	\$ 450	
18	Male Figure #1	1990	Charcoal	60 x 45 cm	\$ 400	
19	Male Figure #2	1990	Charcoal	60 x 46 cm	\$ 400	
20	Leaning Figure #1	1990	Mixed Media	61 x 46 cm	\$ 450	
21	Leaning Figure #2	1990	Mixed Media	61 x 46 cm	\$ 450	
22	Flowers	1990	Pastel & Charcoal	65 x 46 cm	\$ 450	
23	Flowers	1990	Pastel & Charcoal	65 x 46 cm	\$ 550	
24	Flowers In A Vase	1990	Oil Pastel	65 x 50 cm	\$ 550	
25	Flower Study	1990	Pastel	76 x 55 cm	\$ 600	
26	Resting Form	1990	Ink & Wash	41.5 x 30 cm	\$ 300	

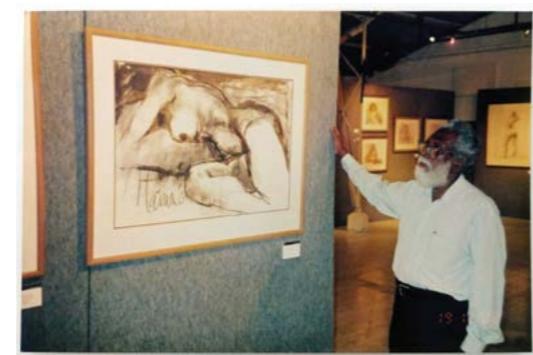
Handwritten price list for the Pinetree Country Club, 2000.

→ NUSENSE
2002

He took part in Group 90's exhibition titled 'NUSENSE' which was held at the NAFA Gallery, 18 - 24 December 2002.



NUSENSE catalogue, December 2002.

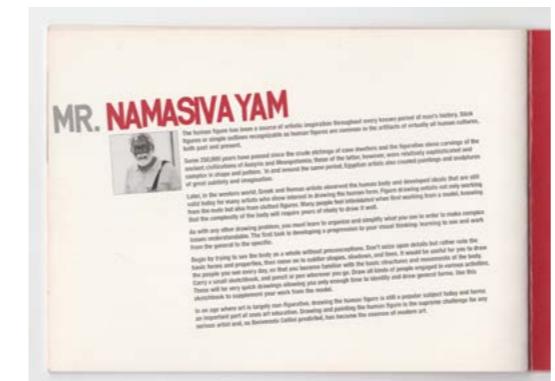
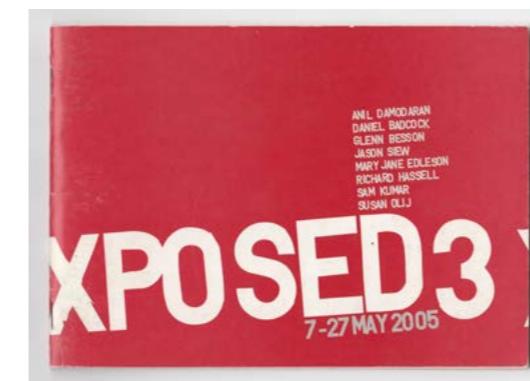


Invitation to Namasivayam's Figurative Expressions, November 2005.

→ SPECIAL GUEST INVITATION AND ARTIST'S SECOND SOLO EXHIBITION
2005

In 2005, Namasivayam was invited as a special guest to an exhibition entitled 'Xposed 3' which was presented and held at Chateau d'Arts Gallery on 7 - 27 May 2005. It was organised by the gallery owner and former Group 90s member, Ms Glennery Besson.

Later that year, he held his second solo exhibition titled 'Namasivayam's Figurative Expressions' held at Bhaskar's Arts Academy new gallery space at 21 Kherby Road, 25 November - 2 December 2005. The exhibition was officially opened by Guest-of-Honour, Dr Ho Kah Leong, former Senior Parliamentary Secretary and former Head of NAFA.



Xposed 3 catalogue, 7 - 27 May 2005.

→ A CLASS ON FIGURE DRAWING:
STRUCTURE AND ANATOMY
2006

He taught a class 'Figure Drawing: Structure and Anatomy' and that was conducted at the Chateau d'Arts Art Gallery.

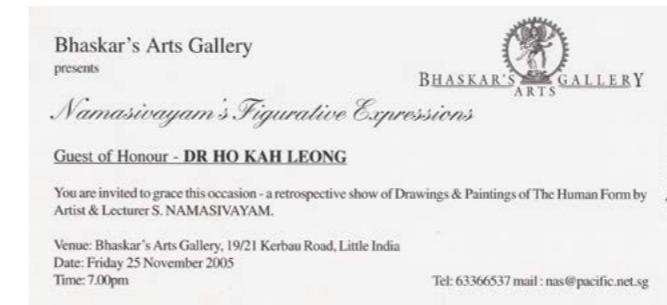
NUSPIRATION
2008

He participated in Group 90's exhibition titled 'NUSPIRATION' held at Bhaskar's Art Academy, 8 - 14 February 2008.



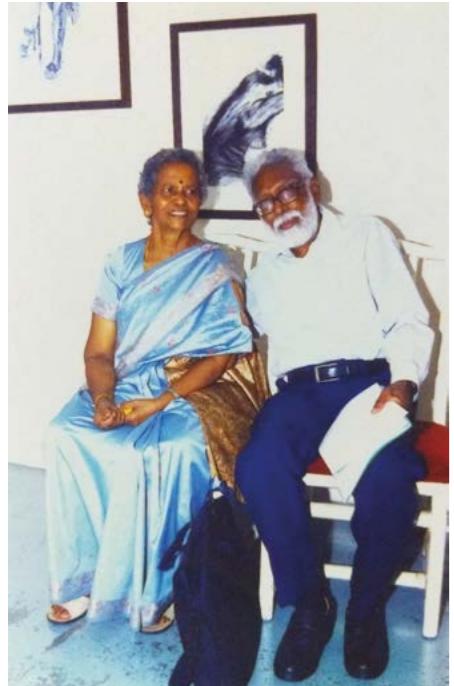
NUSPIRATION catalogue, 8 - 14 February 2008.

Duration of the Exhibition until Dec 2nd 2005
10.00am to 7.00pm



→ FINAL YEARS
2009 – 2012

He always carried a notebook with him at all times, perpetually prepared for the moment when inspiration would suddenly strike him. This was a fact that he mentioned multiple times. During his free time, he could be found at the park, sketching leisurely in order to remain attuned to his artistic impulses.



Mdm Lakshmi Namashivayam with Nama, 2008.



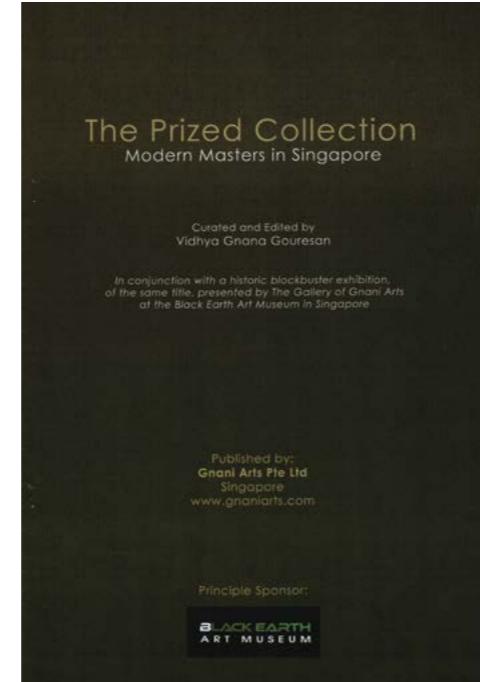
Michele Elizabeth (second from left), Nama, Milenko Prvacki (second from right), Sr K.P. Bhaskar (seated, first from right).



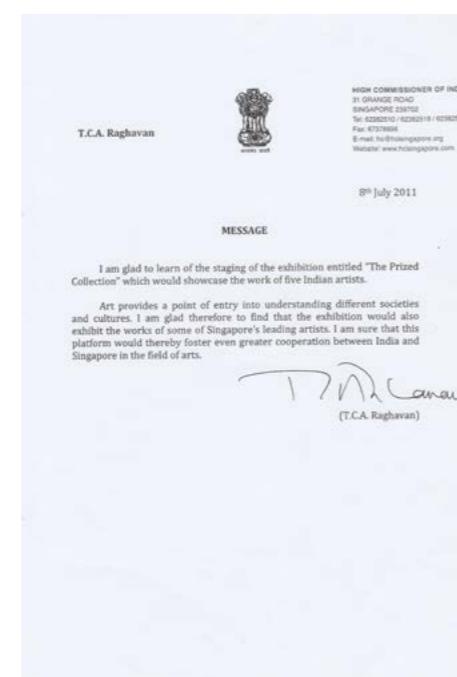
Exhibition setting, Sir Roy Calnes, Nama, artists from Nanyang Fine Arts Academy.

→ THE PRIZED COLLECTION: MODERN MASTERS IN SINGAPORE 2011

In 2011, he participated in a group exhibition entitled 'The Prized Collection: Modern Masters in Singapore', which was presented by The Gallery of Gnani Arts and held at the Black Earth Art Museum, 1 - 14 August 2011.



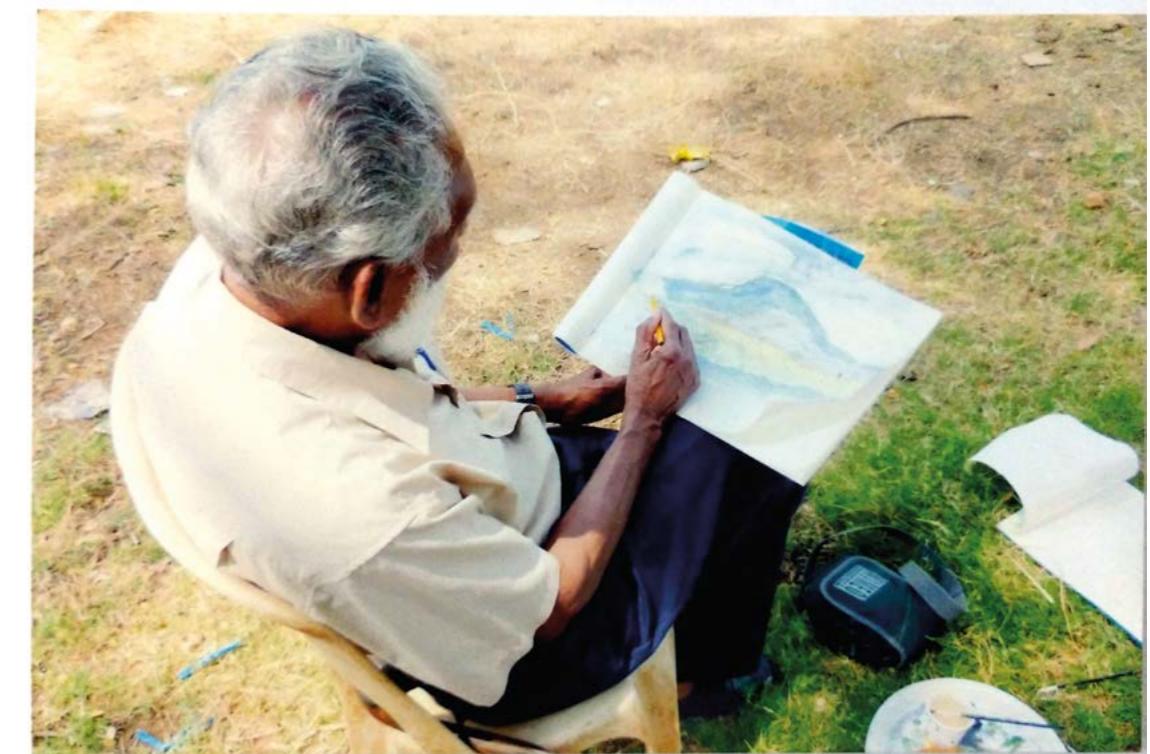
The Prized Collection: Modern Masters in Singapore catalogue, 2011.



Letter from T.C.A Raghavan, former Indian high commissioner to Singapore, dated 11 July 2011.

→ DEATH
2013

Solamalay Namashivayam died of lung cancer on 5th December 2013, at the age of 87.



Nama seated outdoors, painting Tamil Nadu's famous 'Elephant Hill' landmark (Yanai Malai), Madurai, India, 2012.

16 November-22 December 2019

Yeo Workshop

Solamalay Namasivayam
Points of Articulation

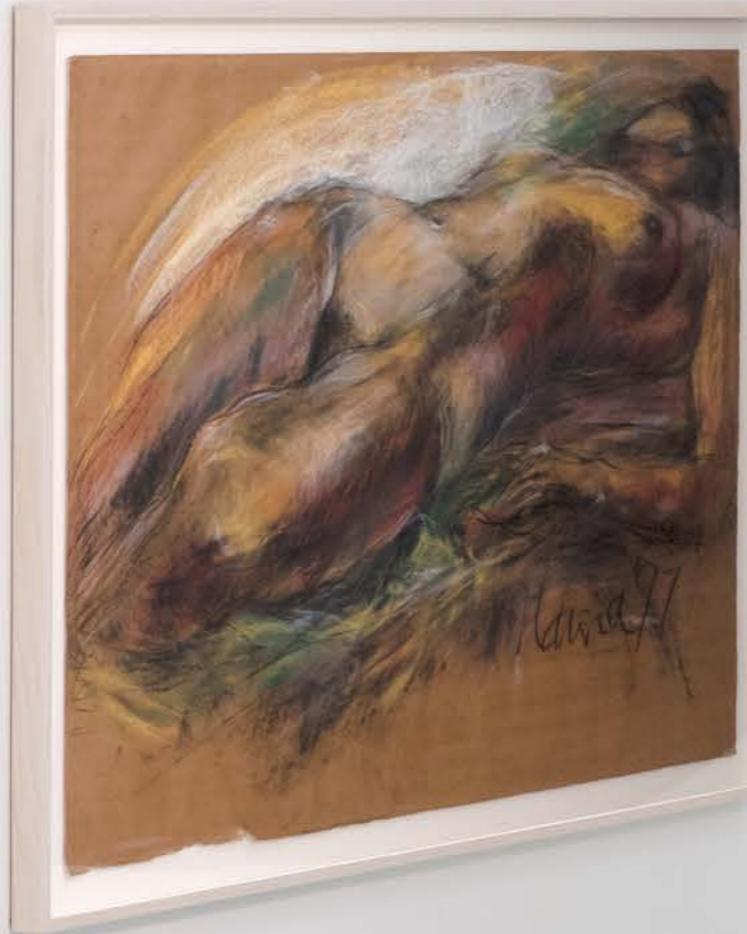
The Exhibition

In November 2019, Yeo Workshop presented Namasivayam's first major retrospective exhibition, *Points of Articulation*, with the aim of bringing his works and life as an artist-educator to light through this important archival project.

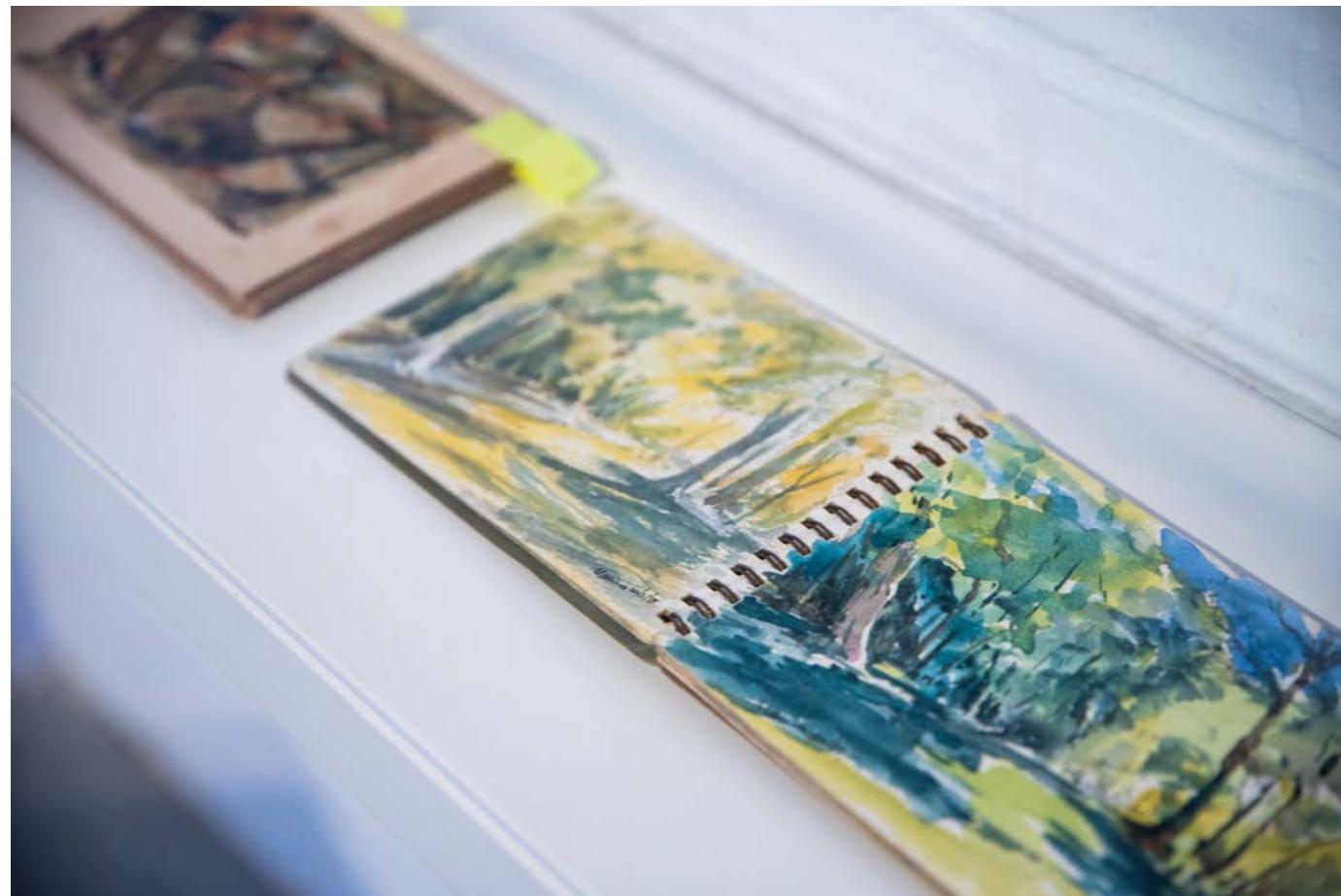
The exhibition showcased more than 30 works done in a variety of mediums to render the human figure; ranging from monochromatic charcoal or ink on paper, to coloured pieces done in pastels or gouache. These works were carefully selected from his extensive oeuvre, and provided insights into his life and practice as both an artist and art educator. The exhibition also featured writings about art by Namasivayam extracted from his personal notebooks and lecture notes.







"Look for meaningful lines which quickly reach to the essence of the total form you're drawing."



Left to right: Audrey Yeo, Yeo Workshop, N. Nedumaran, Mr Kwa Chong Guan, Sentha Wouterlood and Mr Sim Thong Khern



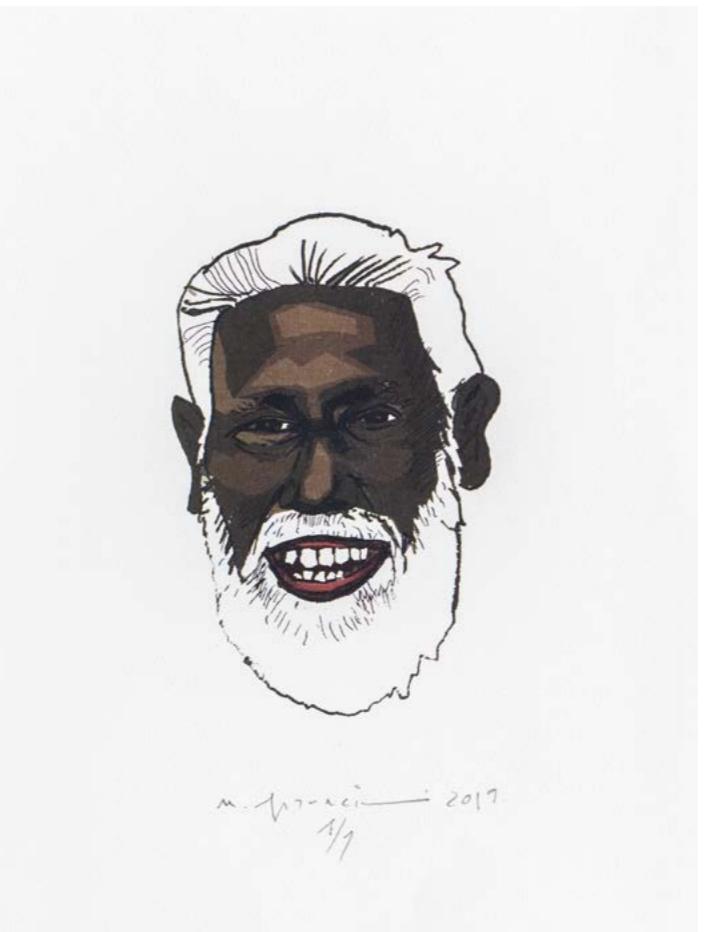
Solamalay Namasivayam: *Points of Articulation* talk panel, 16 November 2019, Speakers from left to right: Milenko Prvački, Woon Tien Wei, T.K. Sabapathy, Sentha Wouterlood, moderated by Audrey Yeo.



Solamalay Namasivayam: *Points of Articulation* talk panel, 16 November 2019, Venue: Art Outreach Gillman Barracks 47 Malan Road 01-24 Singapore 109444.

Contemporary Response for
Points of Articulation

Solamalay Namasivayam's first major retrospective exhibition *Points of Articulation* wishes to provoke new inquiries into Singapore's art history as well as to acknowledge Namasivayam's significant contributions. In conjunction with the exhibition, Yeo Workshop has invited 4 contemporary artists (Alvin Ong, Jason Wee, Mike HJ Chang, and Milenko Prvački) to create new works in response to Namasivayam's works and writings. These works are being shown at the space operated by our venue partner Art Outreach, and this section hopes to illustrate how figurative art has evolved and continues to remain relevant today.



Milenko Prvački, *Solamalay Namsivayam*, 2019. Drawing and prints, 117 x 83 cm

Milenko Prvački is a renowned artist and Senior Fellow at LASALLE College of the Arts in Singapore. He earned his Master of Fine Arts (Painting) degree from the Institute of Fine Arts in Bucharest, Romania. Milenko has exhibited his work across Europe and Asia, including solo shows in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Sydney, and Jakarta, and group shows in Antwerp, Los Angeles, and Sydney. He has participated in symposiums and workshops globally, including a discussion on Southeast Asian art in Belgrade and a visiting professorship at Sabanci University in Istanbul. Milenko's works are featured in various museums, including the Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade, and the Museum of Contemporary Drawing in Nurnberg. In 2012, he was honored with the Cultural Medallion Award for visual arts in Singapore.

Like the late Namasivayam, Milenko Prvački likewise pursued the path of an artist-educator, having been a lecturer and Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts at LASALLE College of Arts. He is currently Senior Fellow at the college. He also knew Namasivayam, and was a close friend of his.



Jason Wee (b. 1979, Singapore) is an artist and writer. Recent projects use a choral libretto as an invitation to consider the design of a general assembly (for the 2019 Singapore Biennale), and the choreographies of secrecy in public spaces, shipping lanes and publishing presses (for the 1st Asia Society Triennale, and the 2022 Kochi-Muziris Biennale). His art practice searches for polyphony and powerlessness in the figurations of Asia and Southeast Asia. His works move restlessly between art, design histories, poetry, publishing, geopolitics, sculpture and photography. He founded and runs Grey Projects, an artists' library, event space and residency. He is the author of three poetry collections, including the Gaudy Boy Poetry Prize finalist *In Short, Future Now* (Sternberg Press, 2020). His last solo exhibition is *Cruising* with Yavuz Gallery Singapore in 2022.

Jason Wee responds to Namasivayam's figures and writings by producing artwork that crafts a picture via the sole medium of the written word. He was selected to provide a purely textural approach which deviates sharply from the exclusively visual one that is often regarded as being synonymous with the discipline of art itself.



Jason Wee, *A Line Has No Gender And Race (?)*, 2019.
Watercolour, watercolour pencil, and ink on Fabriano
paper, 52 x 84m (diptych)

Alvin Ong, *Wish you were here*, 2019. Oil on canvas, 76 x 61 cm

Alvin Ong (b. 1988, Singapore) is a graduate of the Ruskin School of Art, University of Oxford, UK (2016) and the Royal College of Art, London, UK (2018). His paintings playfully combine diverse visual vocabularies alongside his own lived experience of hybridity and distance across a variety of spaces, physical and virtual. At the age of 16, he became the youngest winner of the UOB Painting of the Year Award, Singapore (2005). He was awarded a residency in 2017 with the Royal Drawing School, as well as the 2018 Chadwell Award. His works have been exhibited at the Singapore Art Museum (2007, 2012, 2013), Asian Civilizations Museum, Singapore (2010), Peranakan Museum, Singapore (2015), Northampton Contemporary, UK (2017), National Portrait Gallery, UK (2018), and Royal Academy of Arts, UK (2019). His works are collected by ILHAM Gallery, Ingram Collection, Victoria & Albert Museum (Print Collection), and X Museum. He lives and works in Singapore and London.

Alvin Ong was selected to explore contemporary figurative art in order to delineate how this artistic discipline has evolved in Singapore today.

While the practice of figurative art is grounded in live drawing, we see a different approach manifested in Ong's work that has been rendered in oil on canvas. In stark contrast to Namasivayam who strove to depict the human body in all its anatomical accuracy, Ong instead portrays his subjects in a more surreal and abstract manner.



Mike HJ Chang, Artist sketchbooks, from 2016 to 2018.



Mike HJ Chang, *Caught Flat Footed*, 2019.
Glazed ceramic with artist build wooden display case, 110 cm x 40 cm

Mike HJ Chang, *Lying on the Park Bench for Two*, 2012.
Edition 1 of 5, photograph printed on aluminium, 29.7 x 42 cm

Mike HJ Chang is a Taiwanese American artist and educator in fine arts. He received his Bachelor of Arts from the University of California, Los Angeles, and his Master of Fine Arts from the California Institute of the Arts. Chang currently resides in Singapore. Chang's artwork is marked by a deep curiosity towards conventions of seeing, resulting in shapes, forms and objects that constitute a presence of their own. His recent works convey the theme that the tools and perceptual conventions that we rely on where our interpretation of the world is concerned, may actually deceive us. Accordingly, the artworks explore ways of playing with these instruments rather than being subjected to them.

Chang's work has been exhibited in prominent art galleries such as Yeo Workshop, Chan Hampe in Gillman Barracks. He was commissioned for the main entrance to Art Stage Singapore Art Fair and has exhibited at Shanghai West Bund Art Fair.

Similar to the late Namasivayam, Mike HJ Chang is an artist-educator who imparts his knowledge and passion to the next generation of future artists. He also displays the same enthusiasm towards sketchbooks that was characteristic of Namasivayam. The latter had many sketchbooks that would accompany him on his outings, serving as a canvas for his spontaneous illustrations.

Chang's sculptures incorporate the use of three-dimensional figures.

Solamalay Namasivayam
Curriculum Vitae

Early Life & Education

1926

Born on 6th May, Madurai, South India, the first of ten children in a respectable landowning family.

1931

Arrived with his mother in British Malaya (as it was then known) at the age of five to join his father, who was a foreman-mechanic at the Central Electricity Board in Kuala Lumpur (KL).

Attended a private primary school in Brickfields, KL, run by the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA).

Transferred to a government primary school at Batu Road, KL, after being recommended by a British engineer working with the Board, who spotted potential in him. It was here that the young Namasivayam first discovered his love for art, aided and nurtured by the encouragement of his teachers, who quickly noticed his natural aptitude for the subject.

1939

Enrolled at KL's Victoria Institution (VI), Malaya's premier boys' school, for his secondary education.

1942–1946

Education disrupted by World War II and immediate aftermath.

1947

Completed Senior Cambridge Education at Victoria Institution, Kuala Lumpur.

Professional

1950–1954

National Training Certificate, Diploma in Teaching, Singapore Teachers' Training College. Primary School Teacher (various subjects, various schools).

1957–1961

Colombo Plan Scholarship, Sydney, Australia. Studied Fine Arts. Graduated, majoring in Figure Drawing and Painting.

1961–1962

Secondary School Teacher (Graduate Scale). Taught English, Maths, Art at various schools.

1962–1978

Lecturer in Audio-Visual Education, Singapore Teachers' Training College (TTC), later re-named Singapore Institute of Education (IE) – now known as the National Institute of Education (NIE).

1967 till mid-1970s

Pioneer producer/presenter on Educational Television (ETV) programmes, produced at TTC's Paterson Road studios, which were broadcast nationwide on weekdays via Radio Television Singapore (RTS), the precursor to Mediacorp. His episodes featured lectures on various subjects including Art techniques and Art History. In 1974, ETV was renamed the Singapore Education Media Service (SEMS), which was merged in 1980 into the newly established Curriculum Development Institute of Singapore (CDIS), a policy department within the Ministry of Education.

1982–1985

Senior Media Advisor (Lecturer and Media Specialist), SEMS/CDIS, Ministry of Education.

1987–2001

Lecturer in Fine Art and Specialist Lecturer in Figure Drawing, LASALLE College of the Arts. Introduced 'Life Drawing' as a specific specialist subject into its Fine Arts curriculum in 1987.

Exhibitions

c. 1987

Founder, in close collusion with Brother Joseph McNally, Mr Chia Wai Hon and Mr Sim Thong Khern, of the nucleus of what later came to be known as 'Group 90', an elite cohort of dedicated senior luminaries from within the Singaporean artists' fraternity, who devoted their time to the interpretative study of the human form. As word of Group 90 spread through the grapevine, other well-established and highly reputed personalities joined in. They included Liu Kang, Dr Earl Lu, Ng Eng Teng, Loh Khee Yew, Choy Weng Yang and Prof. Roy Calnes, to name but a few.

1990

Indian Cultural Exhibition.
First Exhibition of Group 90, 'FIGURAMA' by Group 90, Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) Gallery.

1991

Indian Artists' Exhibition.

1992

'THE FIGURE IN ART' (in the Singaporean Context), by Group 90, NAFA Gallery.
'TEACHERS' ART EXHIBITION 1992', organised by MOE, Singapore Conference Hall.

1993

'ART IN ASIA', World Trade Centre, Harbour Front Centre.

1994

'ART OF THE NUDE' by Group 90, NAFA Gallery.

1995

First Solo Exhibition, Mr S. R. Gopal's Security Training Centre, Little India Arcade.

1998

'IMAGE NUDE' by Group 90, Orchard Point Exhibition Hall.

2000

'NUPHORIA 2000' by Group 90, The Gallery @ PARAGON, Orchard Road.
Balmoral Ballroom, Pinetree Country Club.

2002

'NUSENSE' by Group 90, NAFA Gallery.

2005

Xposed 3, Chateau d'Arts Gallery.
Second Solo Exhibition, Namasivayam's Figurative Expressions, Bhaskar's Art Academy.

2008

'NUSPIRATION' by Group 90, Bhaskar's Arts Academy.

2011

The Prized Collection: Modern Masters in Singapore, presented by The Gallery of Gnani Arts, The Black Earth Art Museum, Singapore.

Collections

1. Professor/Doctor Victor R. Savage. Head of Department of Geography, National University of Singapore.
2. Mr S. R. Gopal, P.P.A., P.B.M., P.B.S., Singapore.
3. National Gallery Singapore
4. Singapore Art Museum
5. Singapore American School
6. Other Private Collections: Singapore, UK, USA, Japan, Australia. Various private collections.

"WHILE THERE ARE OTHER BETTER ART CRITICS AROUND, IF YOU ASK ME, IN MY OPINION, MR NAMA WAS AMONG THE VERY BEST ARTISTS ON THE HUMAN FIGURE, BEFORE OR NOW, THAT I'VE EVER SEEN IN SINGAPORE.

I MISS HIM DEARLY."



Self-Portrait, 1991. Graphite on paper, 130 x 83 cm (Framed)

This monograph is published on the fifth year anniversary of the exhibition *Solamalay Namasivayam: Points of Articulation* at Yeo Workshop in Singapore, 16 November – 22 December 2019.

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www.yeoworkshop.com

EDITOR

Nedumaran S/O Solamalay Namasivayam

TEXTS

Audrey Yeo
Mr Kwa Chong Guan
Jolene Teo
Nedumaran S/O Solamalay Namasivayam
Mr Sim Thong Khern
Dr Victor R. Savage
Sentha Wouterlood

RESEARCH

Audrey Yeo
Jolene Teo
Yang Yilin

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Charmaine Kok
Cassie Sim
Virginie Labb  
Ng Linghui

DESIGN

Studio Vanessa Ban

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Jonathan Tan
Ahmad Iskandar Photography

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PROGRAMME

Panel Discussion

Solamalay Namasivayam and Life Drawing in Singapore
Art Outreach, Gillman Barracks, 47 Malan Road, #01-24,
16 Nov 2019, 3–5:30pm

Panelists

Milenko Prva  ki – Artist, Senior Fellow and Faculty of Fine Arts,
LASALLE-SIA College of the Arts

T.K. Sabapathy – Art Historian and Critic, National University Singapore
Sentha Wouterlood – Daughter of the late Namasivayam

Woon Tien Wei – Artist, Post-Museum and The Artist Village

Moderated by Audrey Yeo

Research Presentation

The Production of the Nude in 20th Century Singapore and About Group 90
– Yang Yilin

Research Presentation

Historical Sources and Gallery Research
– Jolene Teo

ASSISTED BY

Nurhanan Farid
Nathalie Soo
Charmaine Ng
Nur Aryani Binte Rayindraja Subarman
Raya Ganaban

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T.K. Sabapathy
The Naranayanasamy Family
Mr Andrew Yeo and Mdm Goh Choo Lee

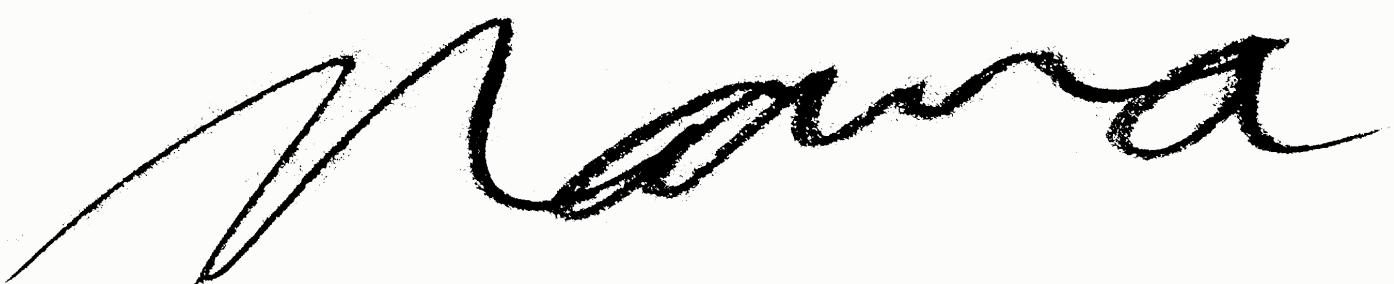
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"The beauty and structural aspects of the human figure have always intrigued me. Drawing them is fundamental to my art. I find it stimulating and challenging to study and discover its complexities every time I draw the human figure. It appears to be a never ending journey of exploration and discovery."

A large, black, handwritten signature that reads "Marisa". The signature is fluid and expressive, with a prominent, sweeping initial stroke on the left.