

ARTISTS TOGETHER





# ARTISTS TOGETHER





This book is dedicated to Floyd Kuptana, who challenged me to come up with ways for us to work together.

"Artists together!" he'd laughingly growl.

And who is this 'us'?

Gallery Arcturus is a unique place, an experiment you could say, founded on inquiry and beauty, a search for objectivity. An unusual meeting. For those few 'us' who work here I can say that it is more than a job we share, it is a space we have obligated ourselves to care for and make use of the opportunities possible here.

Floyd came to Gallery Arcturus in the early days of our existence, bringing one of his sculptures wrapped in a bag, selling it to cover his daily expenses. Floyd is a master sculptor. All of his carvings are mysteriously alive. The works of many sculptors, while beautiful, seem to be frozen or petrified. His are still moving, he himself cannot hold onto them. When he finished a piece he was able to let go of it, almost immediately, with no backward glance. When I held the first sculpture that he brought to the gallery and turned it in my hands I couldn't stop crying. Something almost too familiar, too known. He must have sensed this in us too because he became a frequent visitor. In the beginning we were both a little awkward and shy. Even so, he always wanted me to show him what was new, what I was working on now. His ability to see other people's art work was unusual. No pretension, no flattery, just untamed curiosity. He confidently declared that I was a real artist; I took it to be a mandate more than a compliment. From that moment I wanted to measure up to his belief. Artist is a hard role to fill. There is always something that can threaten creative impulse.

Floyd himself was burdened with many demons that he had to keep happy. While with us they usually waited at the back door but after an hour or two they grew impatient and he would have to leave. Sometimes he showed up still in their grips, unable to shake them. On those days the visit would be rigorously denied.

When he was in carving mode Floyd would carry small finished pieces from home. A good salesman he'd somehow manage to get us all making bids for them. Whoever placed the cash on the table first won the prize. The motive for the visit swung between monetary gain, creative inspiration and cosy companionship with priorities changing depending on circumstance but always beginning with coffee. If I can't speak for all of us all of the time I can say for myself I was almost always happy to see him. The us I am referring to is: - Eron, Ed, Cathy, Jim, Mark, Sae and me, Deborah. We each had our own unique relationship to Floyd. I am writing from my experience and the perspective I am witness to.

Eron reminds me that Floyd's first painting was after he looked at drawings that I had made of his sculptures. I guess seeing a representation of something three dimensional, something he knew, opened up possibilities. His creatures could be the subject of his paintings. He went home and painted dancing bears with long teeth, birds and faces with three eyes, always in vivid colours, dollar store turquoise, red, white, yellow. His first masterpiece was done on the surface of his coffee table. When done he ripped off the top and brought it to the gallery, the nails still sticking out, a dangerous spiky frame.

"I'm a painter now." he proudly announced.

Floyd loved creating, he loved learning. He had no resistance to making his mark. So, once he had a paint brush in hand, his favorite colours opened and a board in front nothing could stop him. It began that he only painted in the gallery when we set him up. In a few months he was painting in his apartment and bringing the vivid canvases to the gallery to sell. It's a lot harder to buy stones to carve and find a place for tools and the mess they will make. Paintings became Floyd's currency and he found others besides us who supported his new career.

Floyd did paint by himself, when he couldn't manage to get out but he didn't like to be by himself. He often called and spoke to Eron or Ed, for hours if they let him. It was very hard to hang up on Floyd. I had the worst time of it so often I would purposefully avoid getting caught. Ed was attentive for as long as he was able, then he'd buzz him down to Eron. Eron could go the longest, he would put Floyd on speaker and continue with his work, commenting when required. Cathy received private visits on Mondays when the gallery was officially closed. And Jim inspired a sober respect from Floyd no matter what his particular state of disarray.

Floyd was born on February 14, 1964, in Cape Parry, North West Territories. That would make him an Inuit artist, in our description surely, not his. Artists do not belong to cultures. He was exceptional and eccentric by any community's standards. Fearless when challenged and shy when accepted. His beginnings were more different than anything we can imagine but I never heard him criticize the circumstances of his life. He was no victim. Things happen and they make for good stories. He liked to tell stories. In the early years they were short and often repeated, over time the tellings had less bravado and more detail. The arctic landscape ran through him, even after so many years spent away. The concrete on the shore of the Toronto lake, the downtown city streets and the route to the 'Old Man's Club' on Sherbourne to buy cigarettes, all were worn smoother by his walking. He had an intimate relationship to the outside world he lived in and to the people he met there. He lived in this city, Toronto, for much of his life.

Ferocious Joy. Two words that describe him well, ferocious and grateful. I have never met anyone more full of sincere gratitude. I think that Floyd was incapable of being insincere. He might pretend that he didn't have a bottle up his sleeve but he knew we knew.

The basement door at the gallery leads to the work studio. There is always art lying about, recently finished or still in process. The days that Floyd made it to the gallery he always wanted something to engage in, some project we could do together. Eron tried to get him doing collage with some success but Floyd was not very comfortable with this medium, too complicated and fiddly. Eron and I would feed him pieces of images but he was not satisfied til he added paint or chalk. His favorite artists were Van Gogh and Picasso. 'Starry Night' was the subject of many of his first paintings, sometimes adding Snoopy sleeping on top of an igloo. Picasso's 'Portrait of Dora Maar' was a figure he painted again and again in true Kuptana style. Whatever Floyd did was fast, no hesitation, an immediate eye to hand response. Every stroke a thin slice of a knife on stone.

All of the drawings in this book were done sitting round a table in the basement gallery studio. Sometimes it would be Sae myself and Floyd, often Vivian came by to join us, on occasion Maya, Eron's daughter, visited from Montreal and one time Joan and Dominique drew with us on their way back home to France. Mark was a wave passing back and forth behind our chairs and Jim and Cathy surprised us with peek throughs.

Eron was the constant witness. Because of him we know this actually happened.



"Showtime." Floyd declared at the start of every draw.

The agreement was always the same, we began and finished together, three minutes for each drawing. The subject was chosen from our collection of art books. Paintings by Picasso, Miro, Dali and others were picked in large part to satisfy Floyd's criteria of what he liked and felt possible. When working fast the image cannot be too complicated or detailed. We worked on dollarama black boards, approximately the same size, 20" x 30", choosing coloured chalk from a shared assortment. There was always laughter and a sense of joyful competition, with serious intention. We did our best. I would say that each of us sensed these times were special, a creative high that we know now will not come again. There will never be another Floyd Kuptana. Life delivers strange circumstances. These drawings are the last work that we did together.

*Each day is a journey and the journey itself home. Basho*

Floyd flagging down an ambulance to hitch a ride to the hospital. That's unimpeded creativity.

*Written by Deborah Harris  
September 2021*



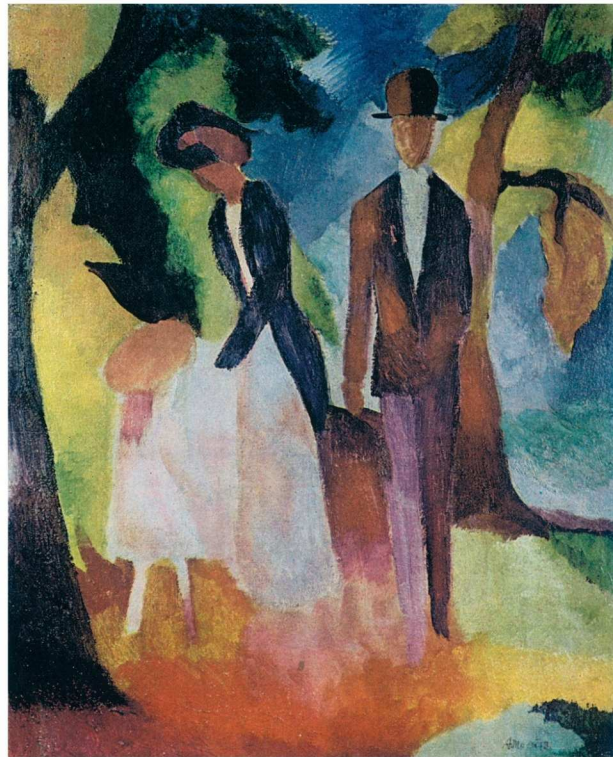
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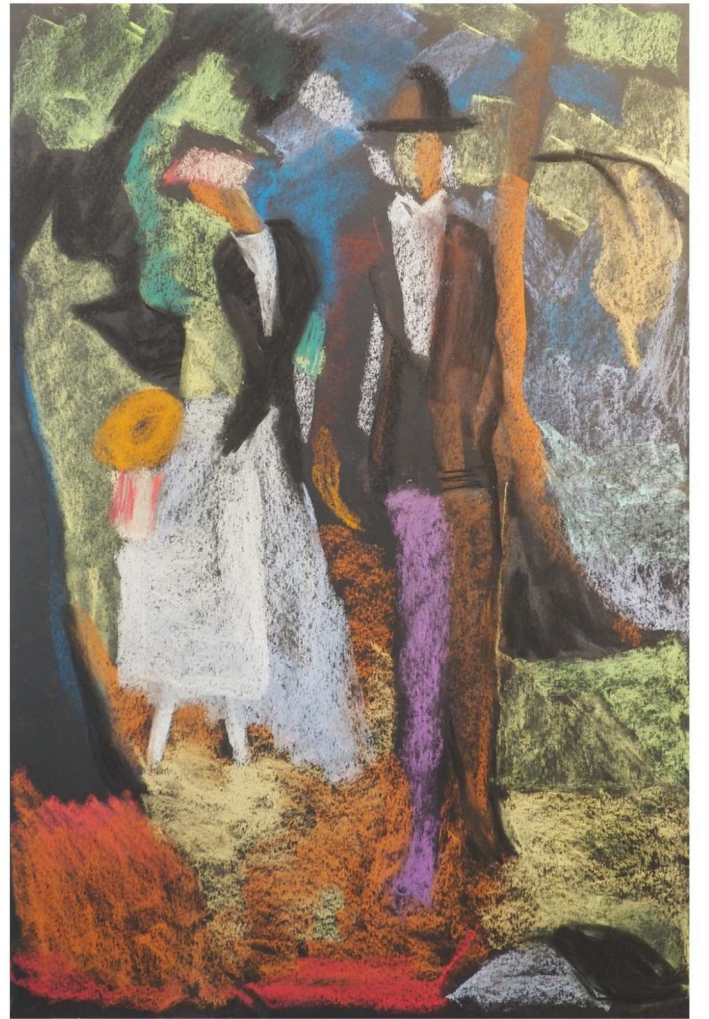
Floyd Kuptana



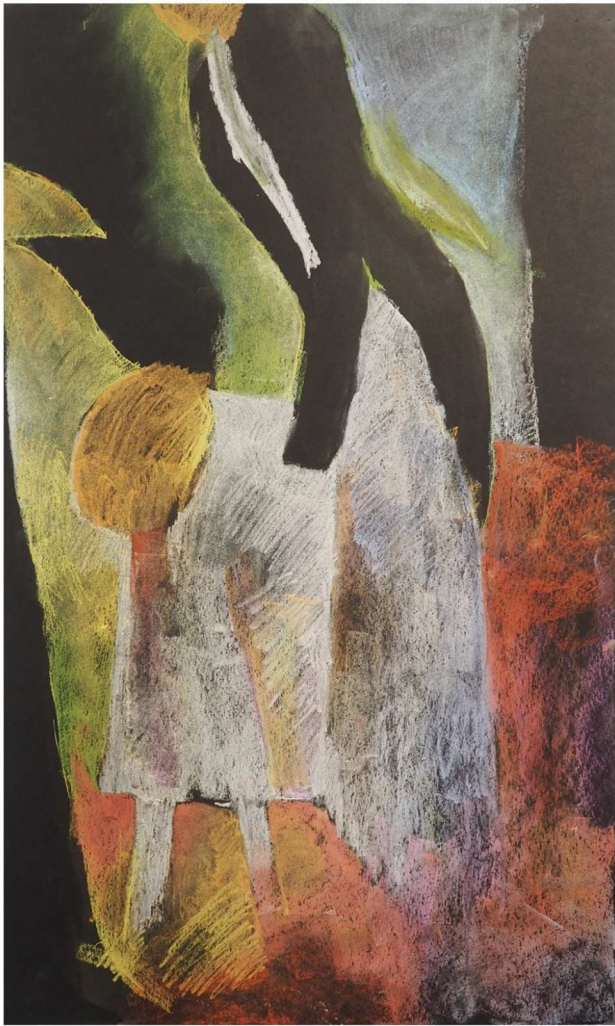
Deborah Harris



August Macke



Vivian Felsen



Sae Kimura



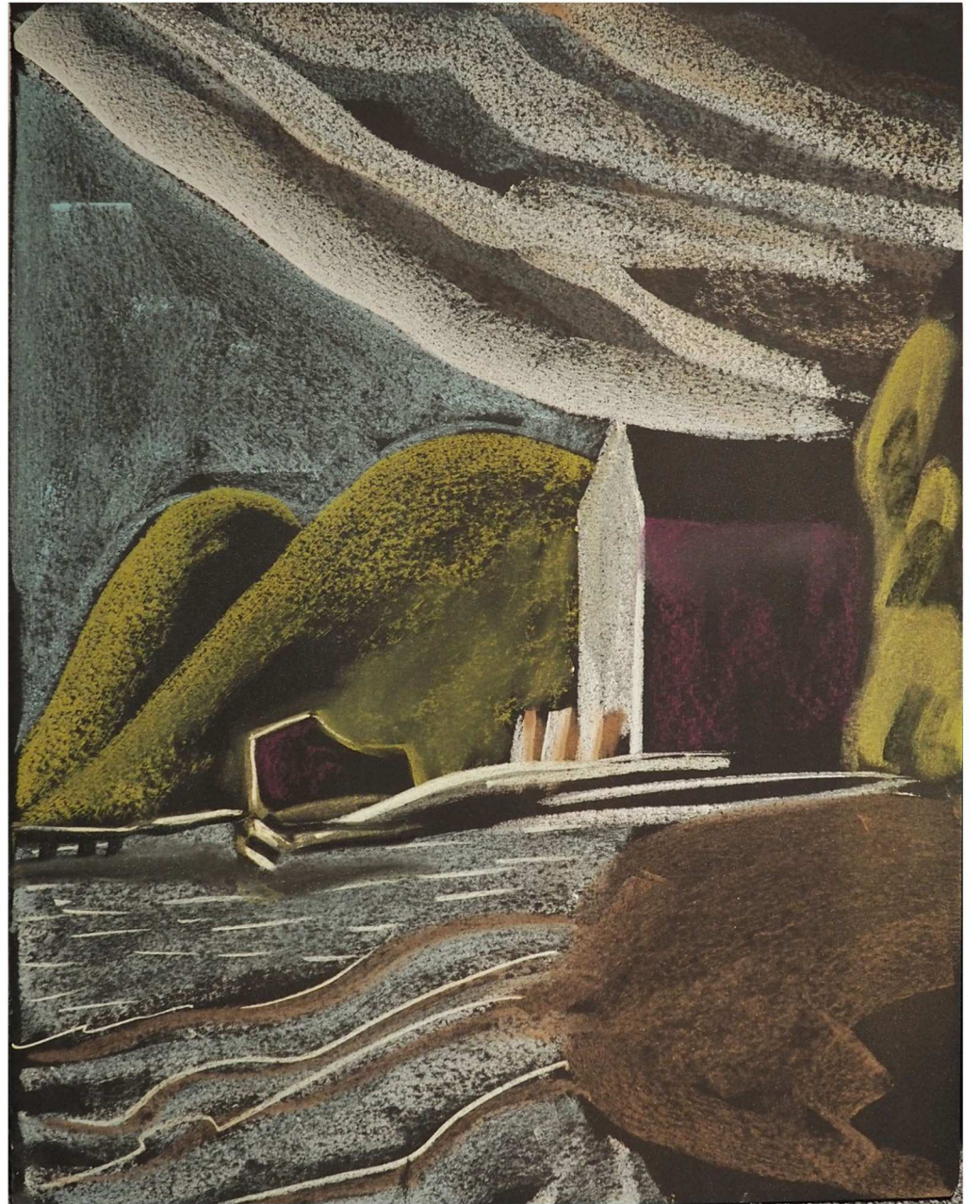
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Deborah Harris



Lawren Harris



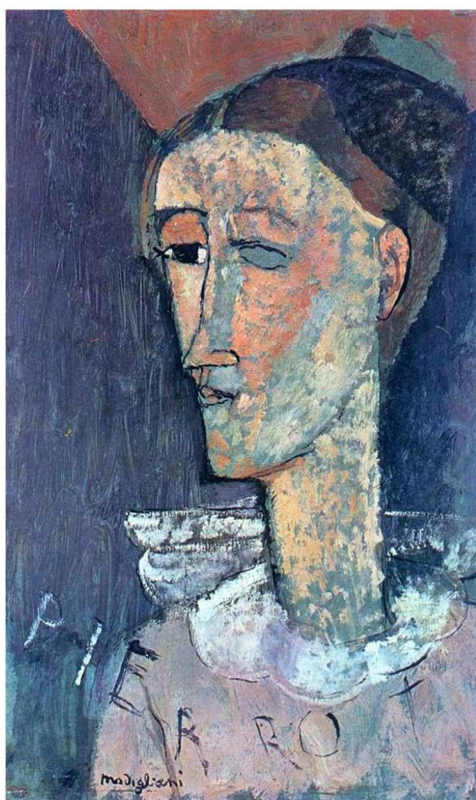
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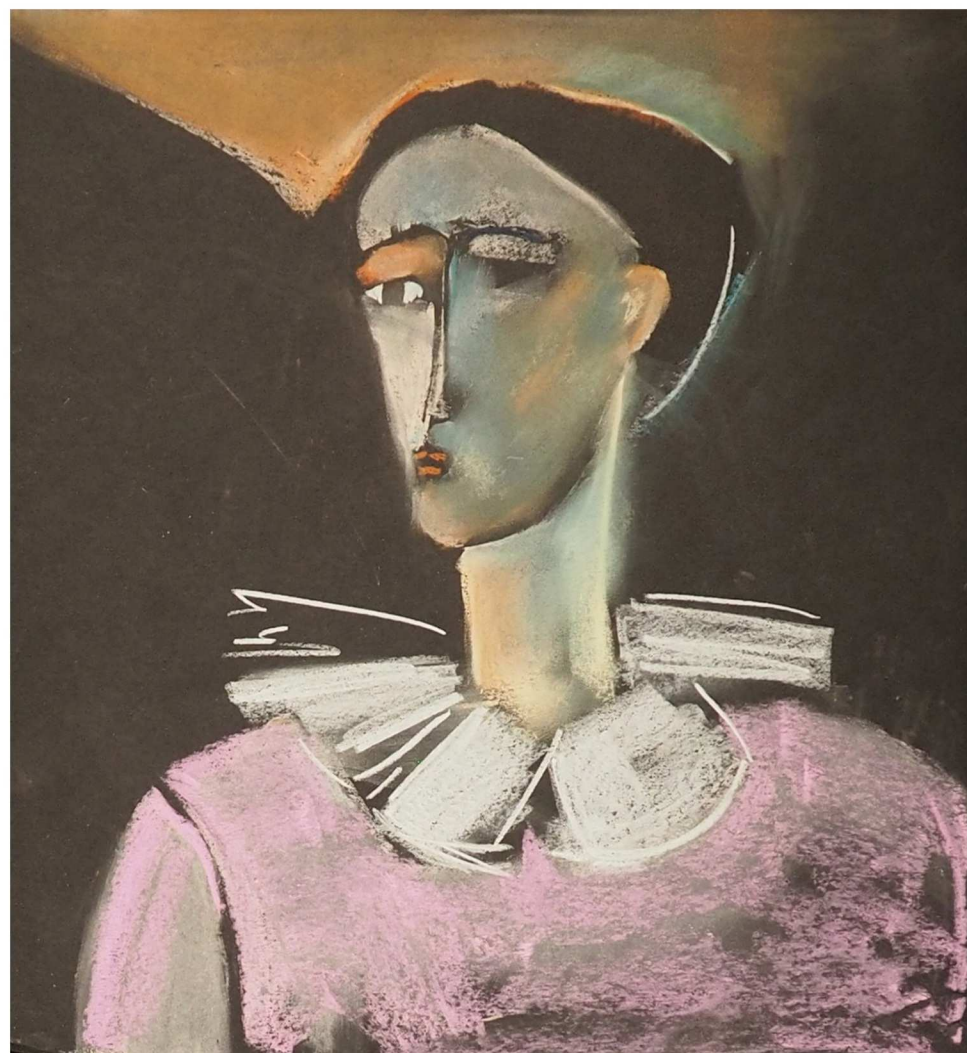
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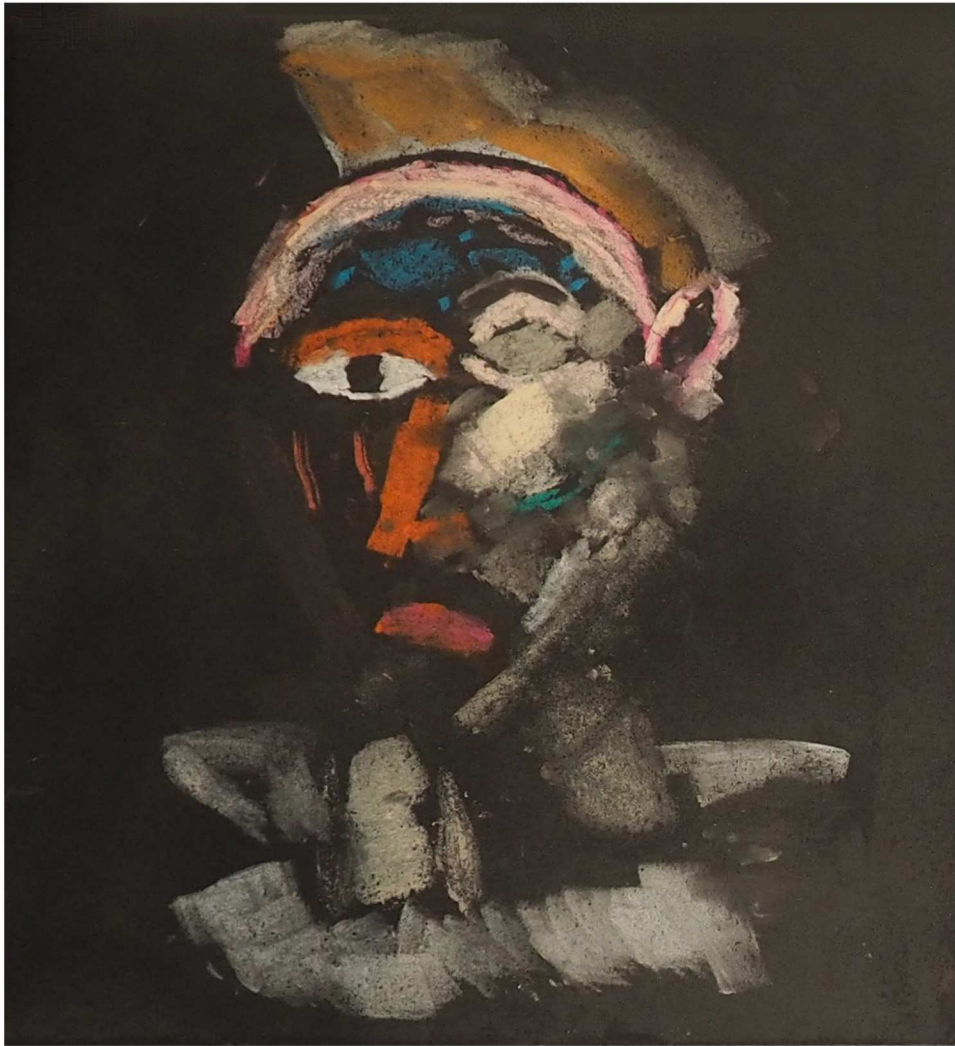


Amadeo Modigliani

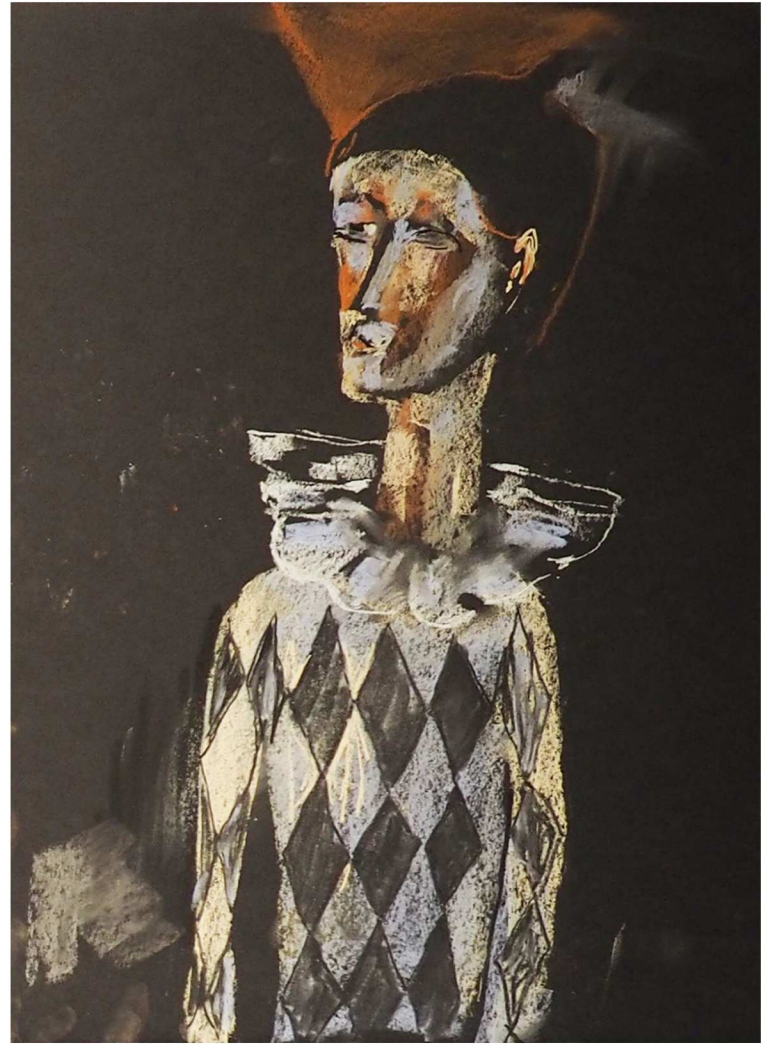


Deborah Harris





Floyd Kuptana



Sae Kimura



Salvador Dali



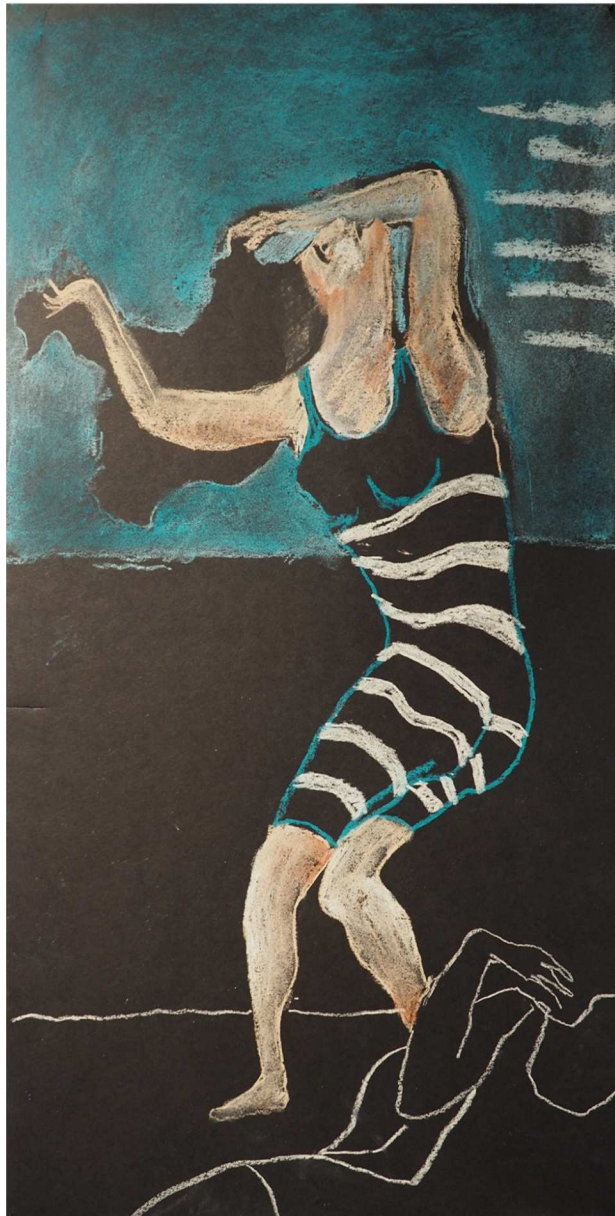
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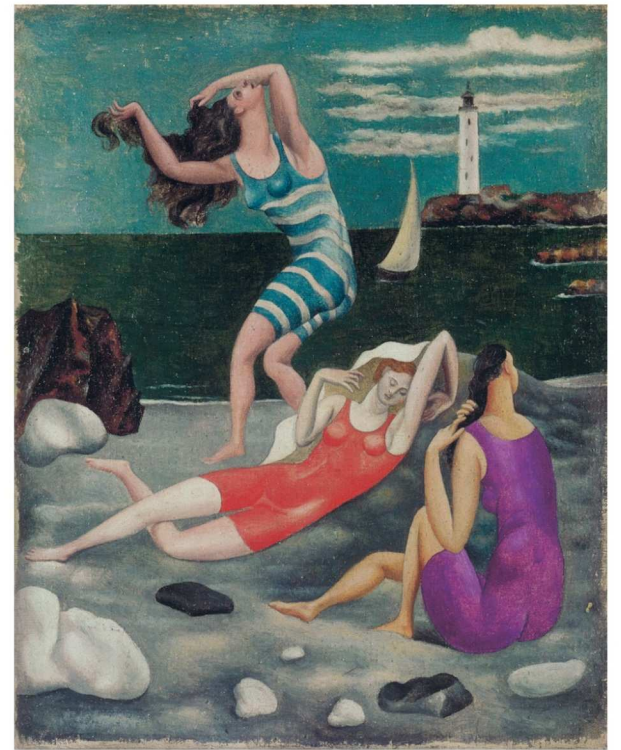
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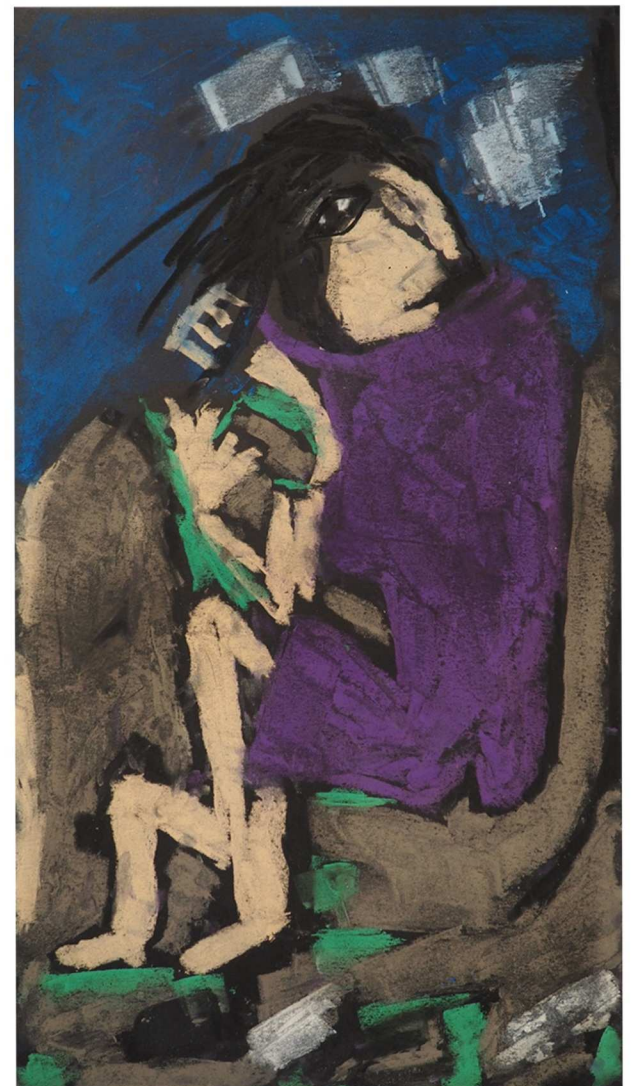
Deborah Harris



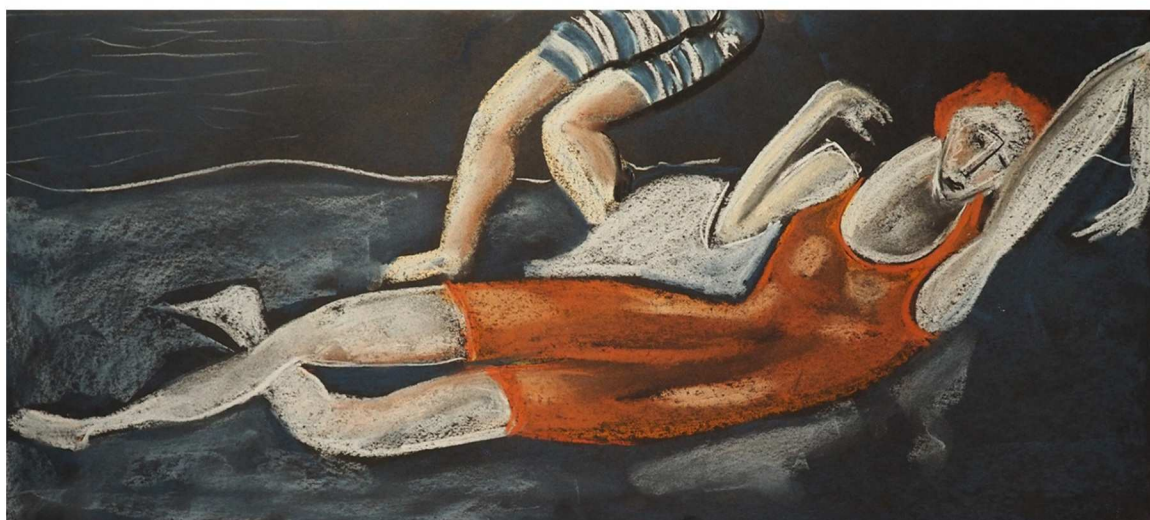
Sae Kimura



Pablo Picasso



Floyd Kuptana



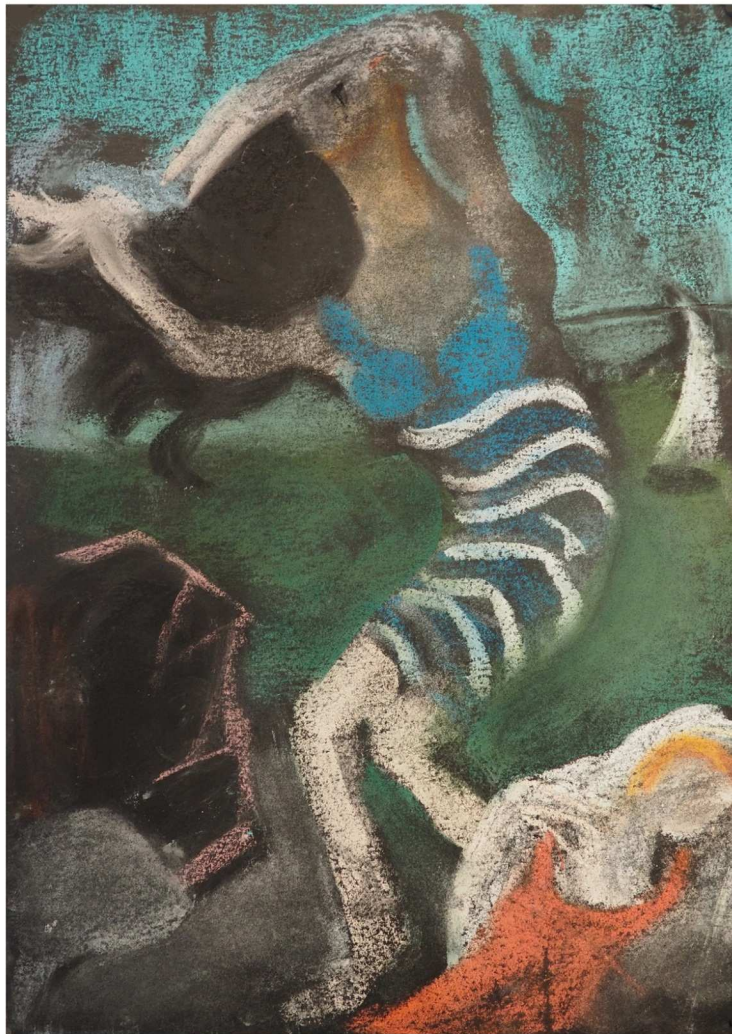
Deborah Harris



Deborah Harris



Sae Kimura



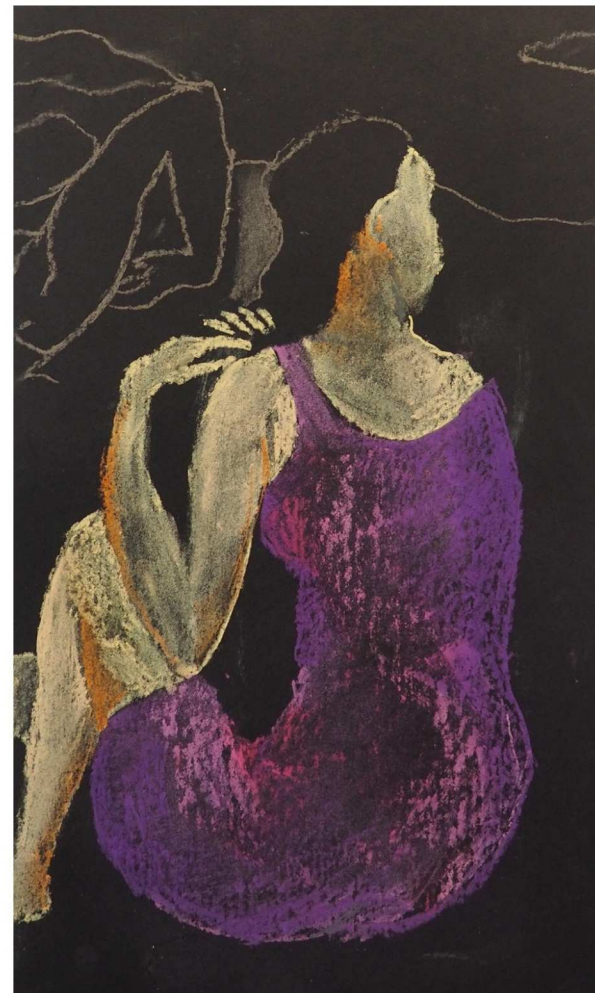
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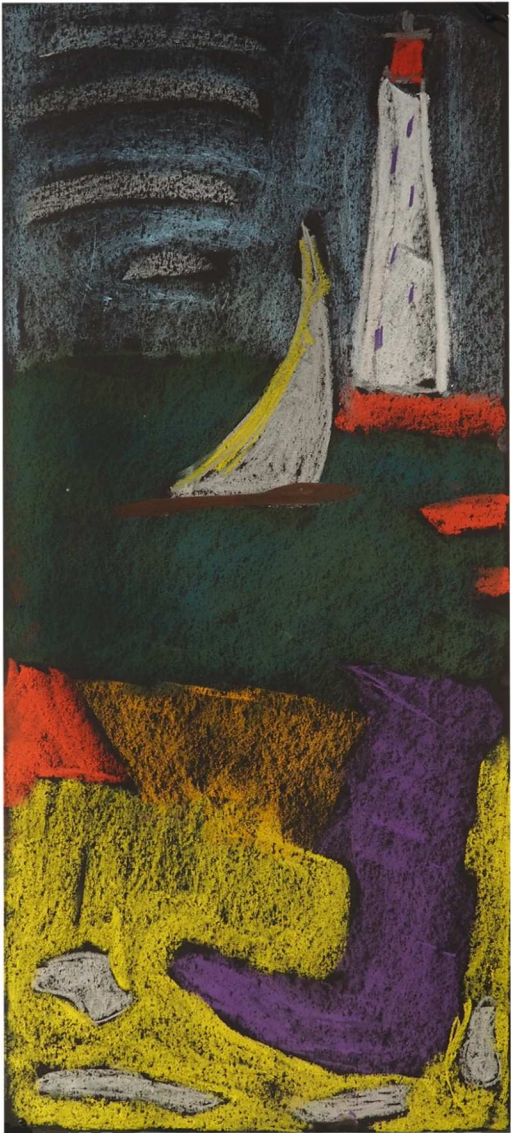
Deborah Harris



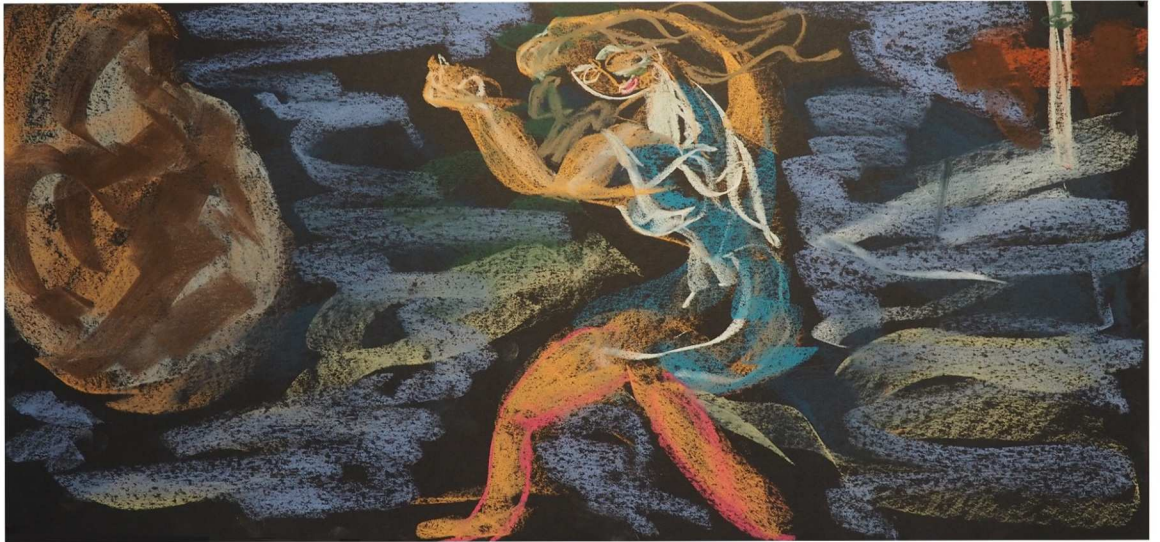
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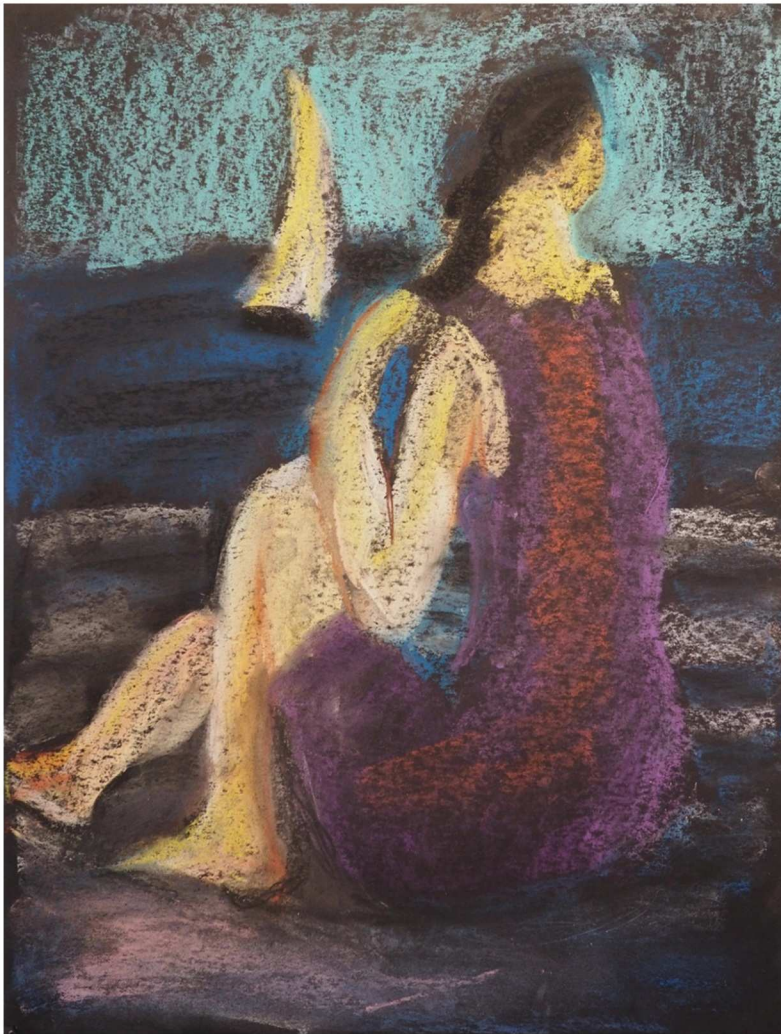
Sae Kimura



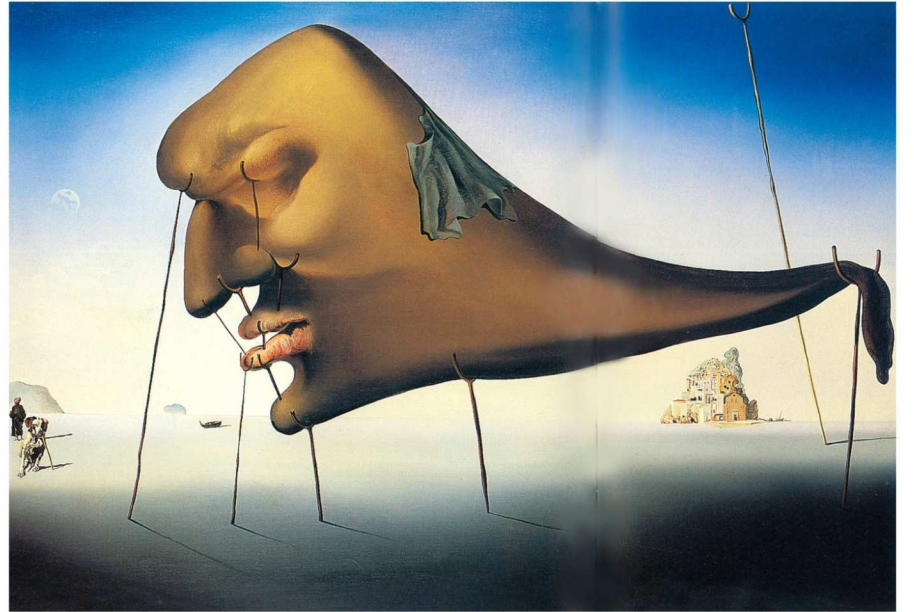
Dominique Cruchet



Joan Cullen



Vivian Felsen



Salvador Dali



Deborah Harris





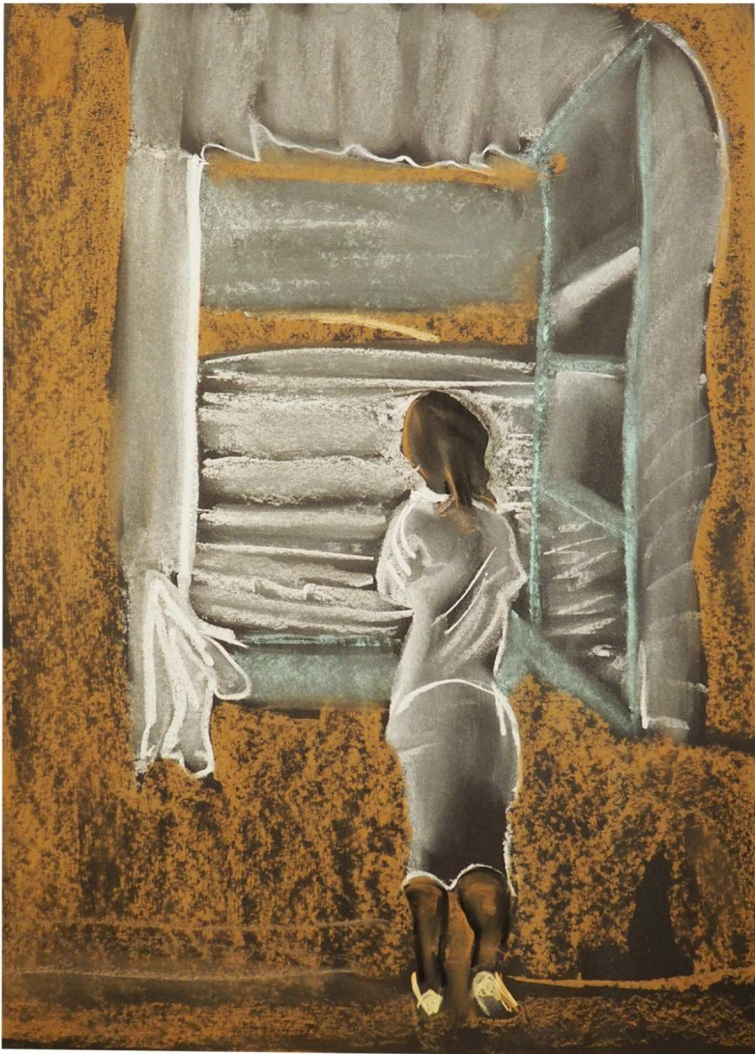
Sae Kimura



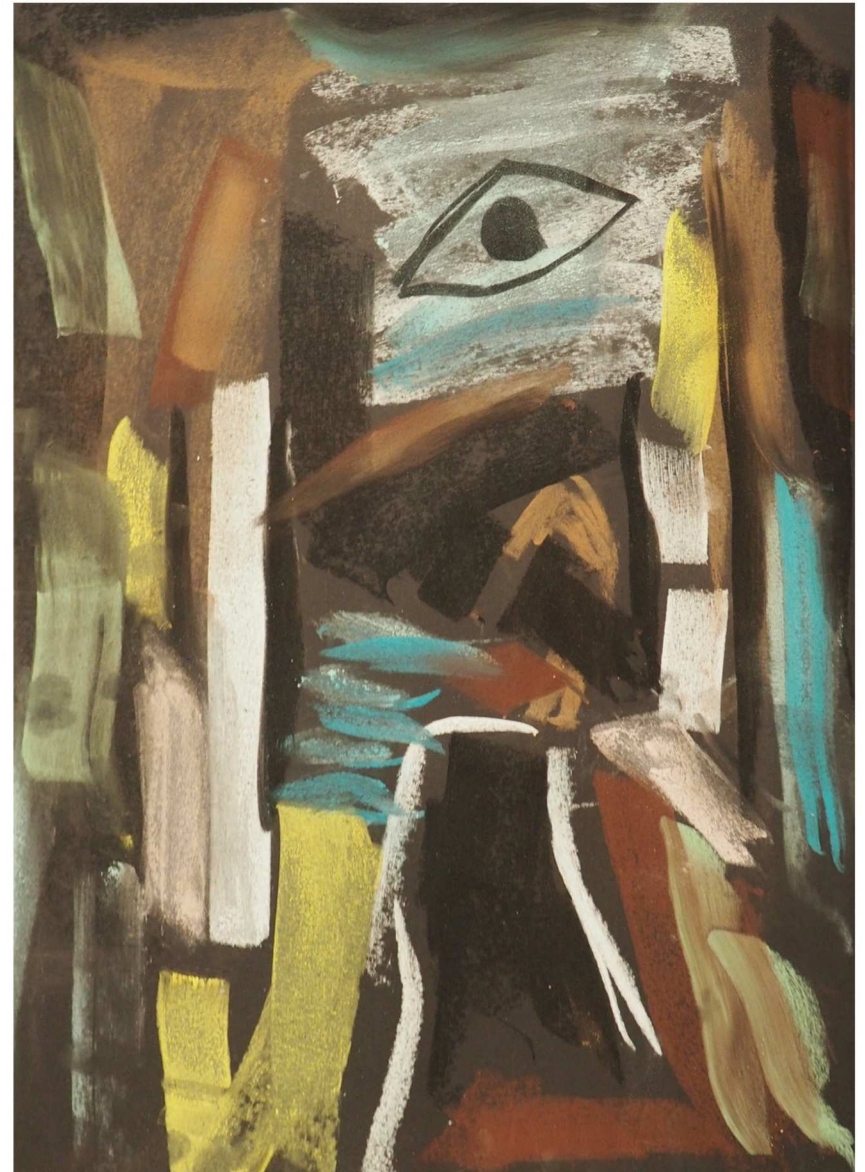
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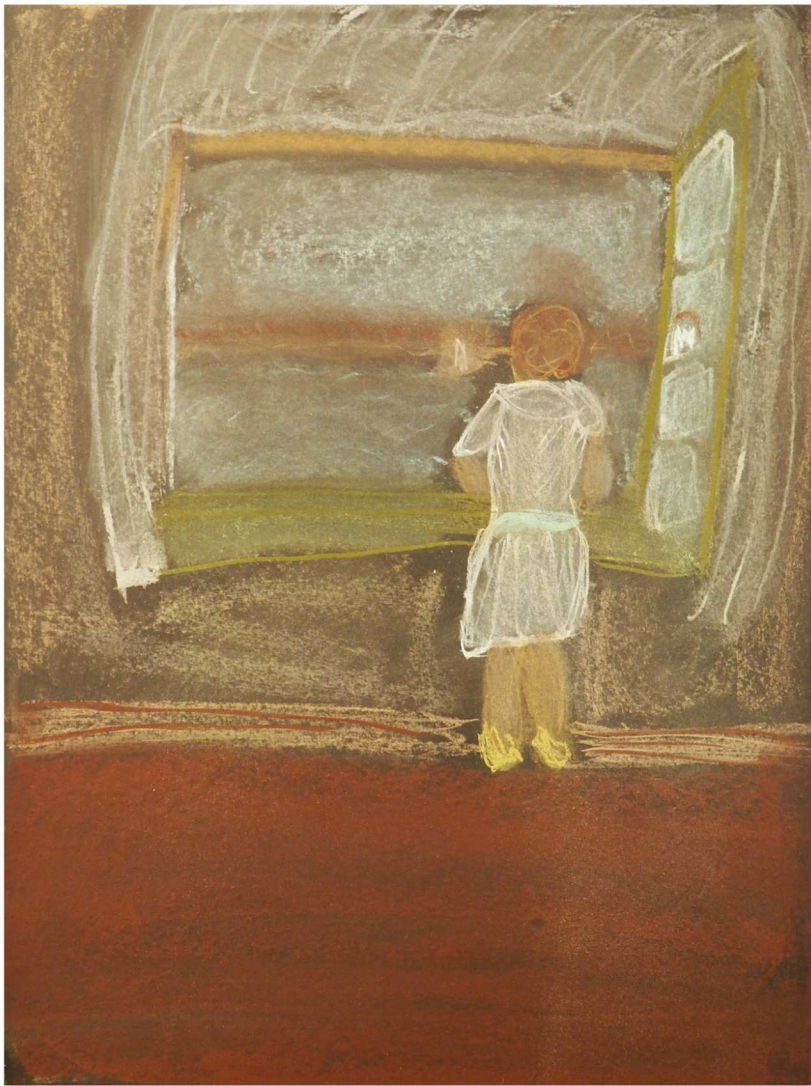
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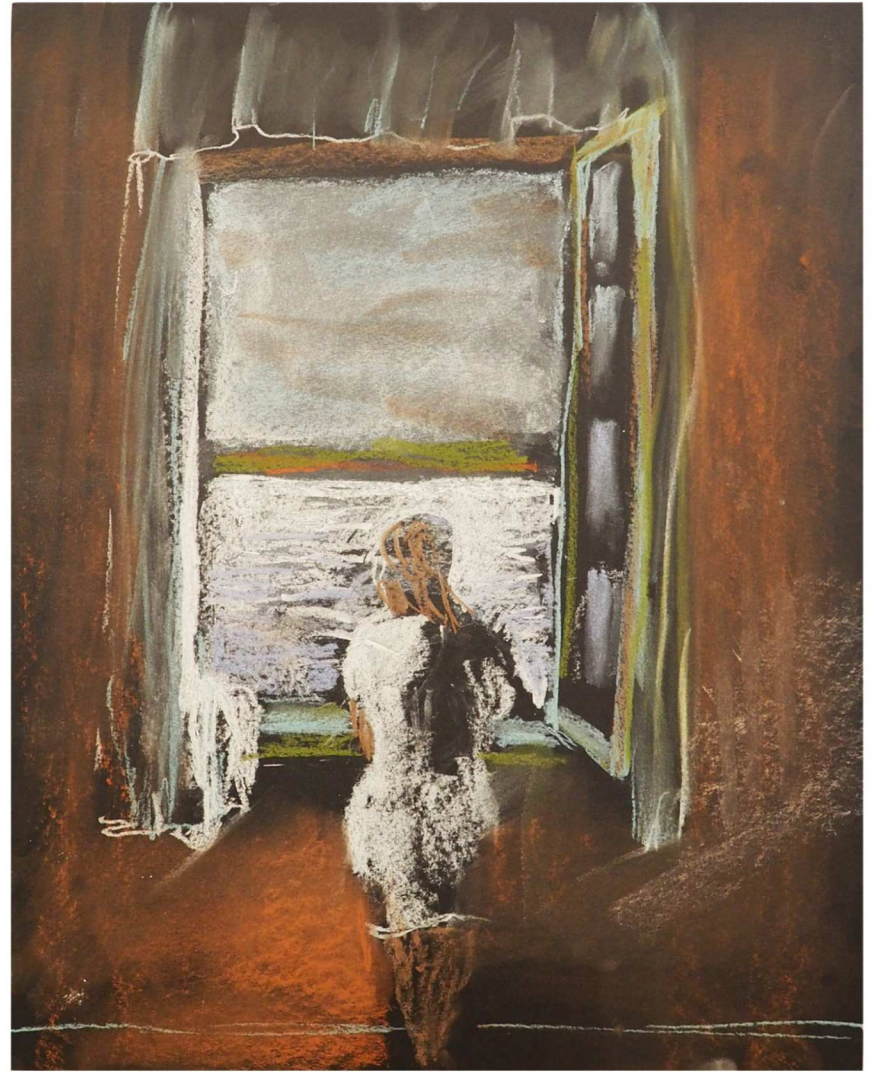
Deborah Harris



Floyd Kuptana



Maya Rain



Sae Kimura



Vivian Felsen



Floyd Kuptana



Georges Braque



Sae Kimura



Deborah Harris



Pablo Picasso



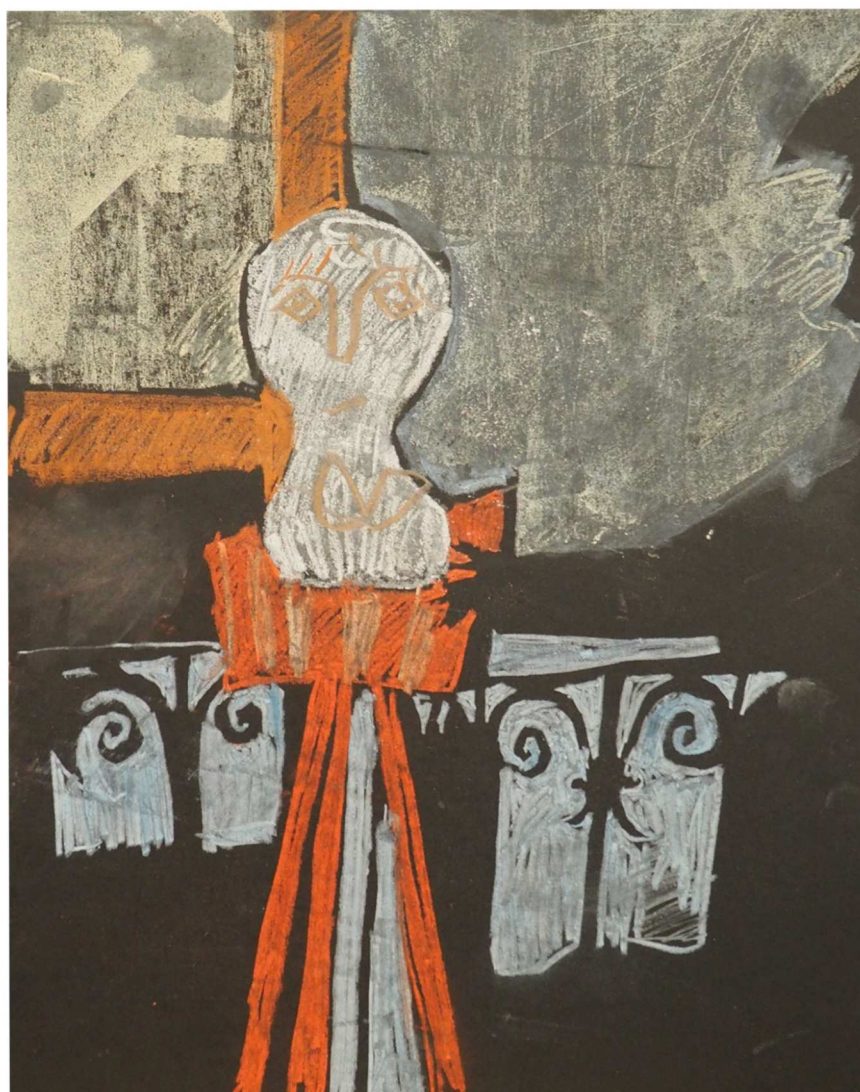
Maya Rain



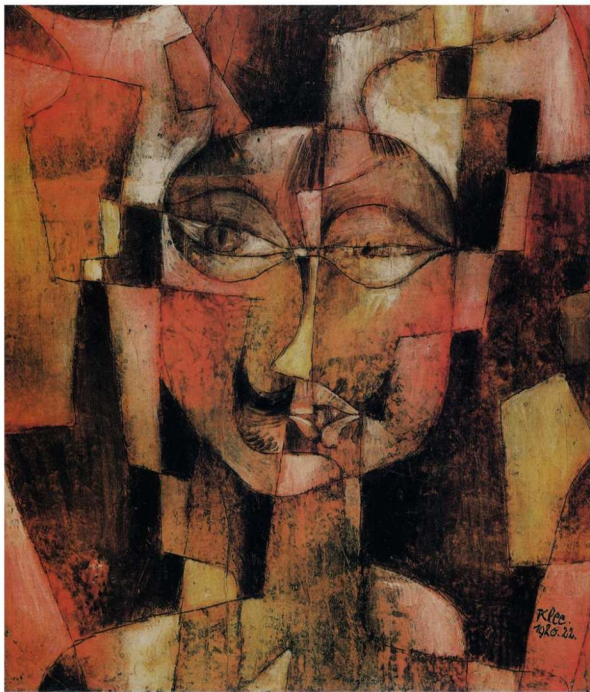
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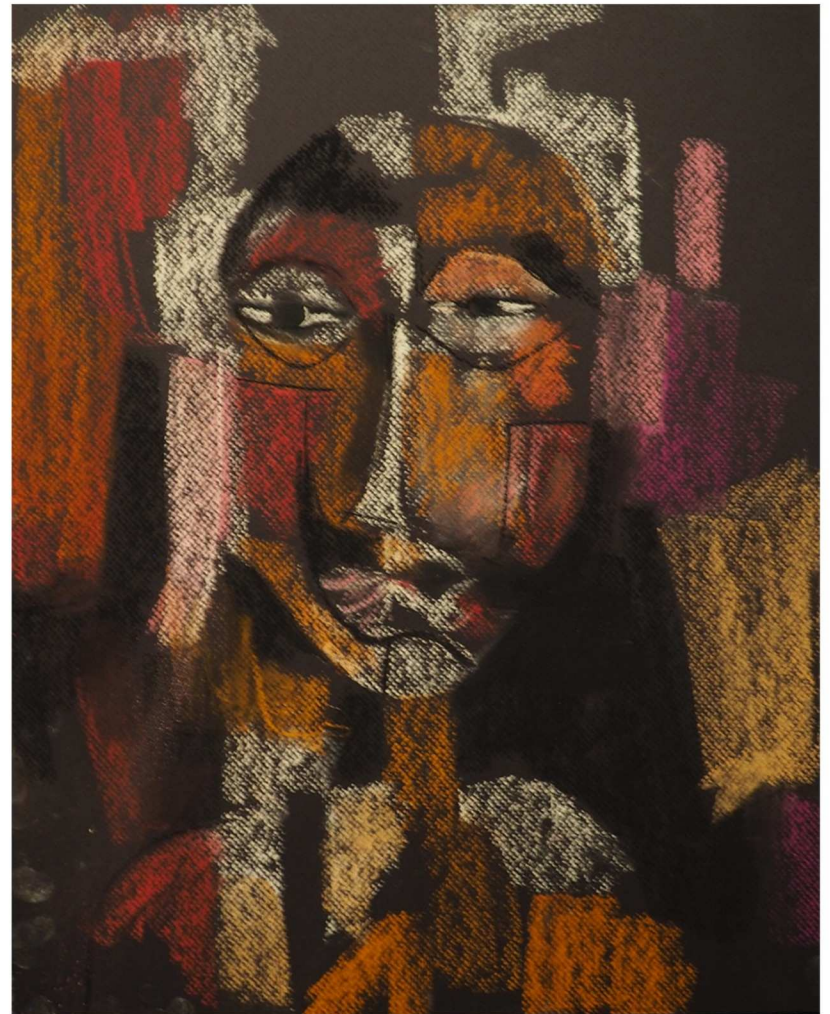
Deborah Harris



Sae Kimura

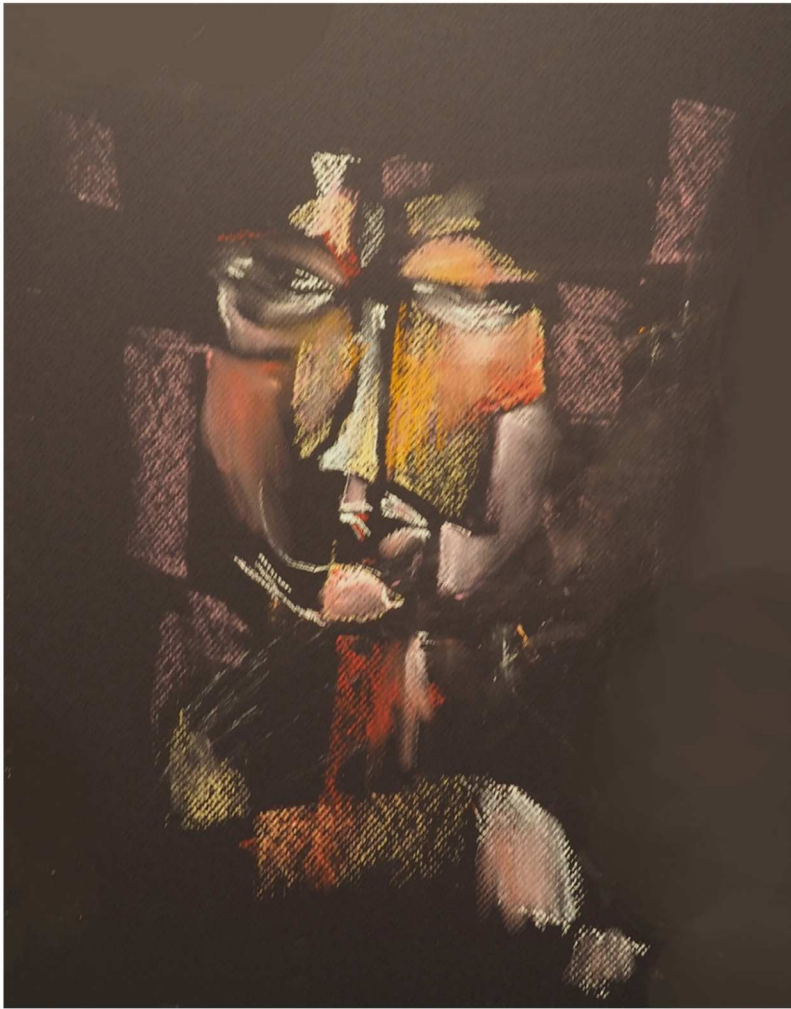


Paul Klee

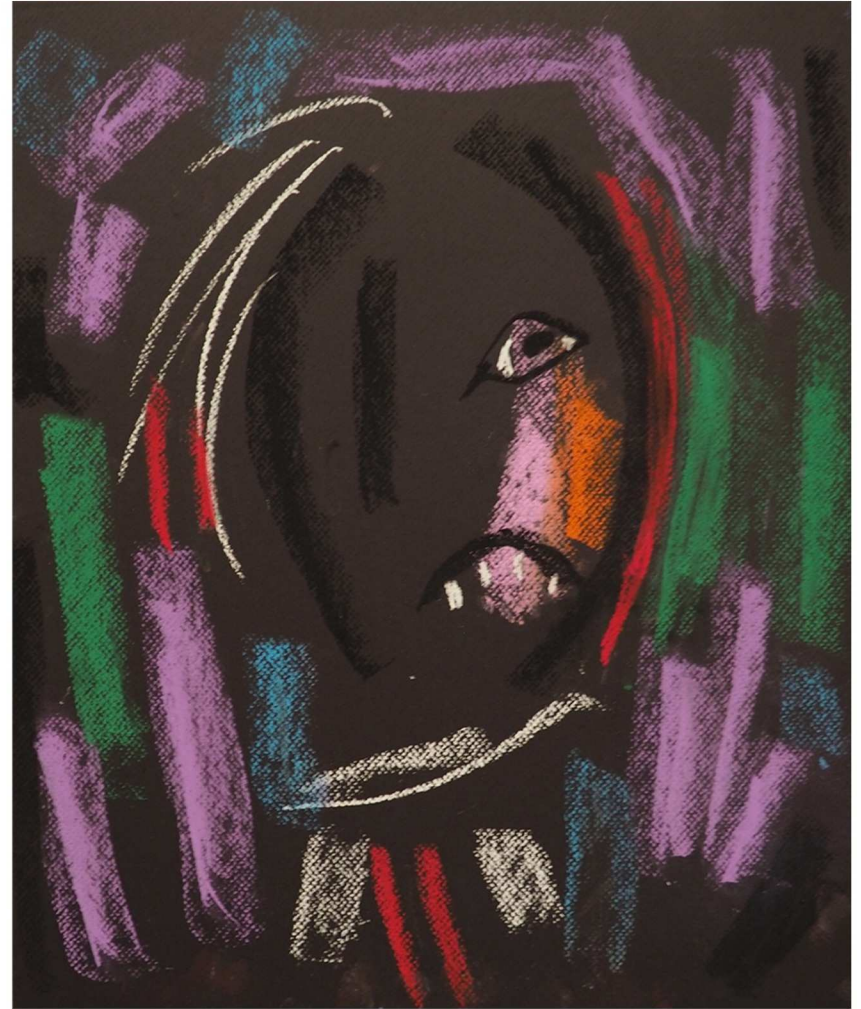


Deborah Harris

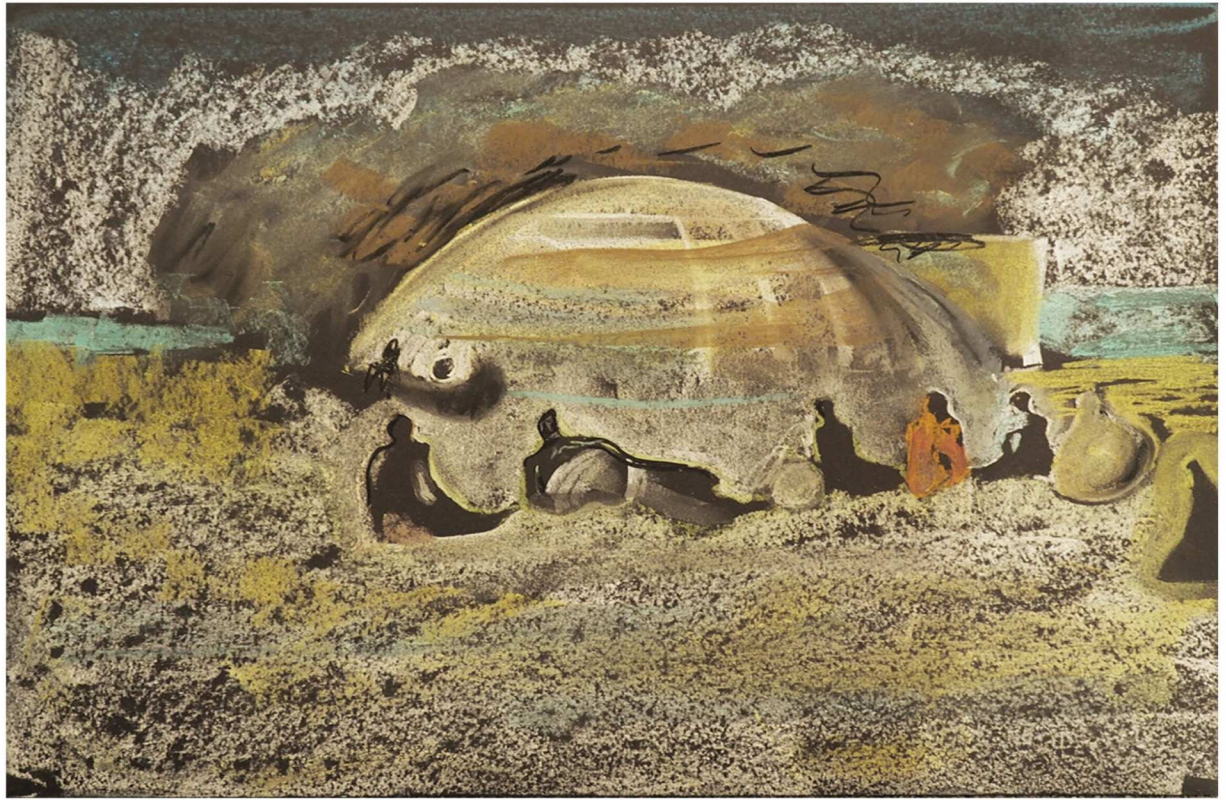




Sae Kimura



Floyd Kuptana



Deborah Harris



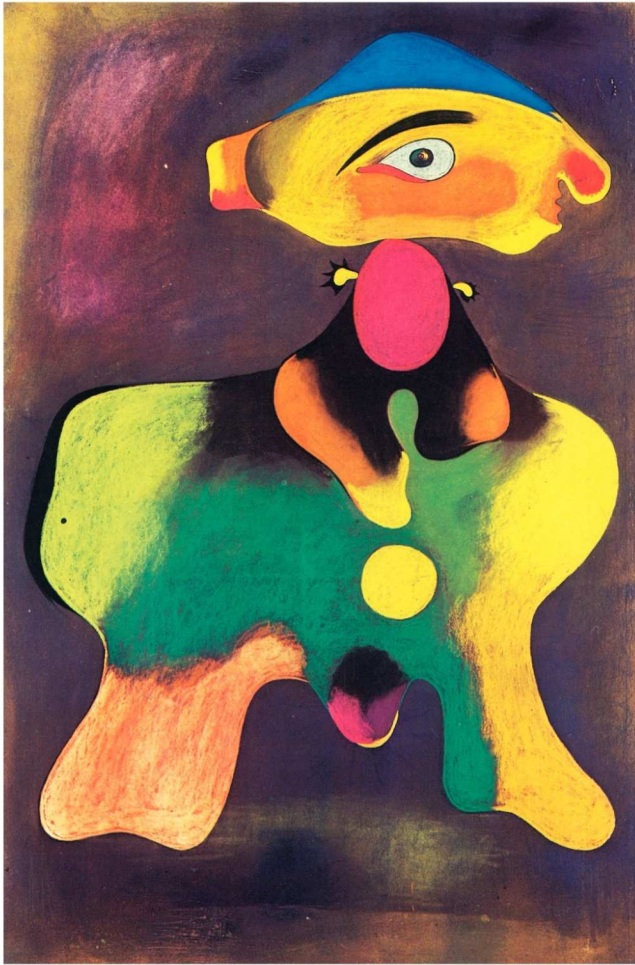
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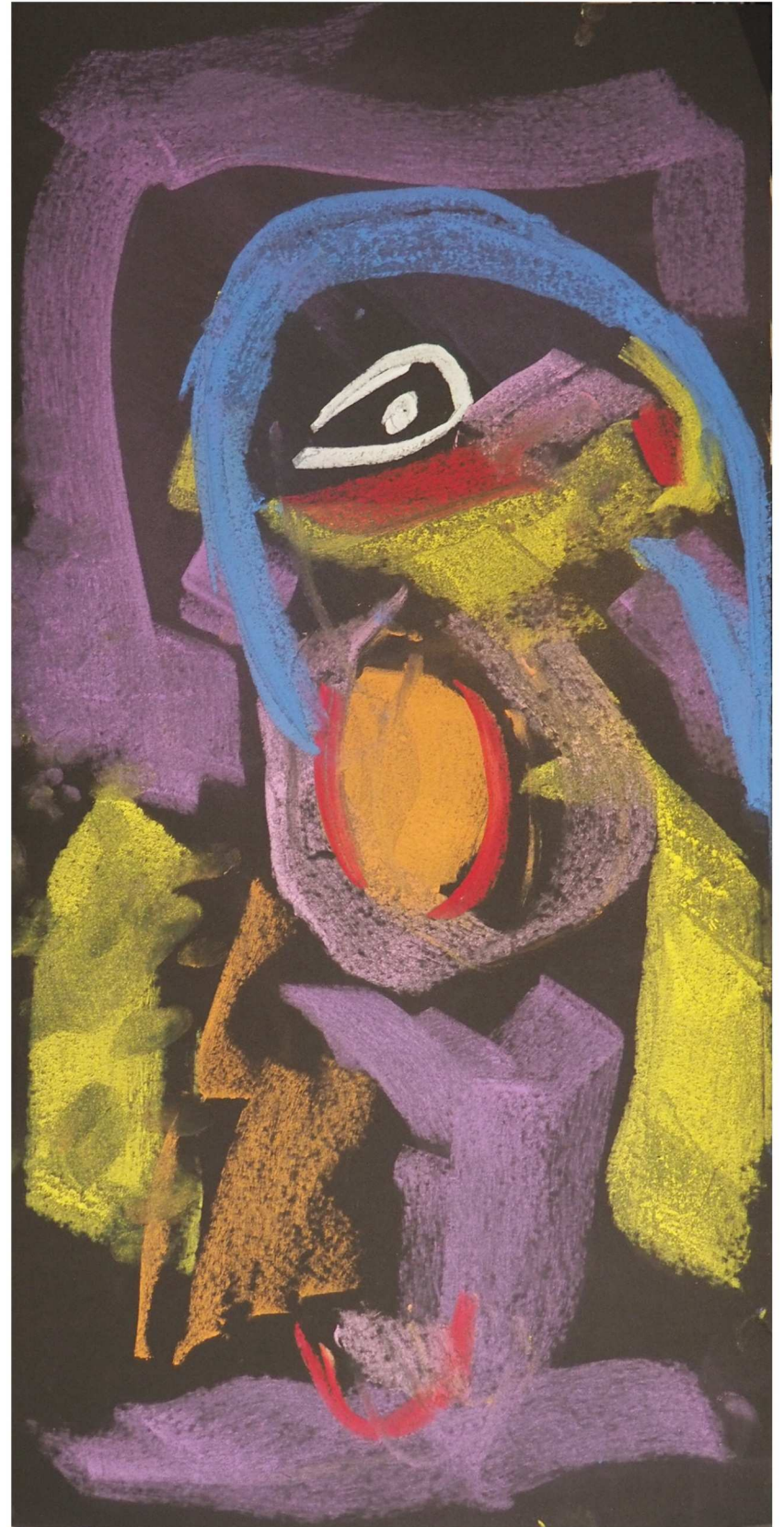
Salvador Dalí



Sae Kimura



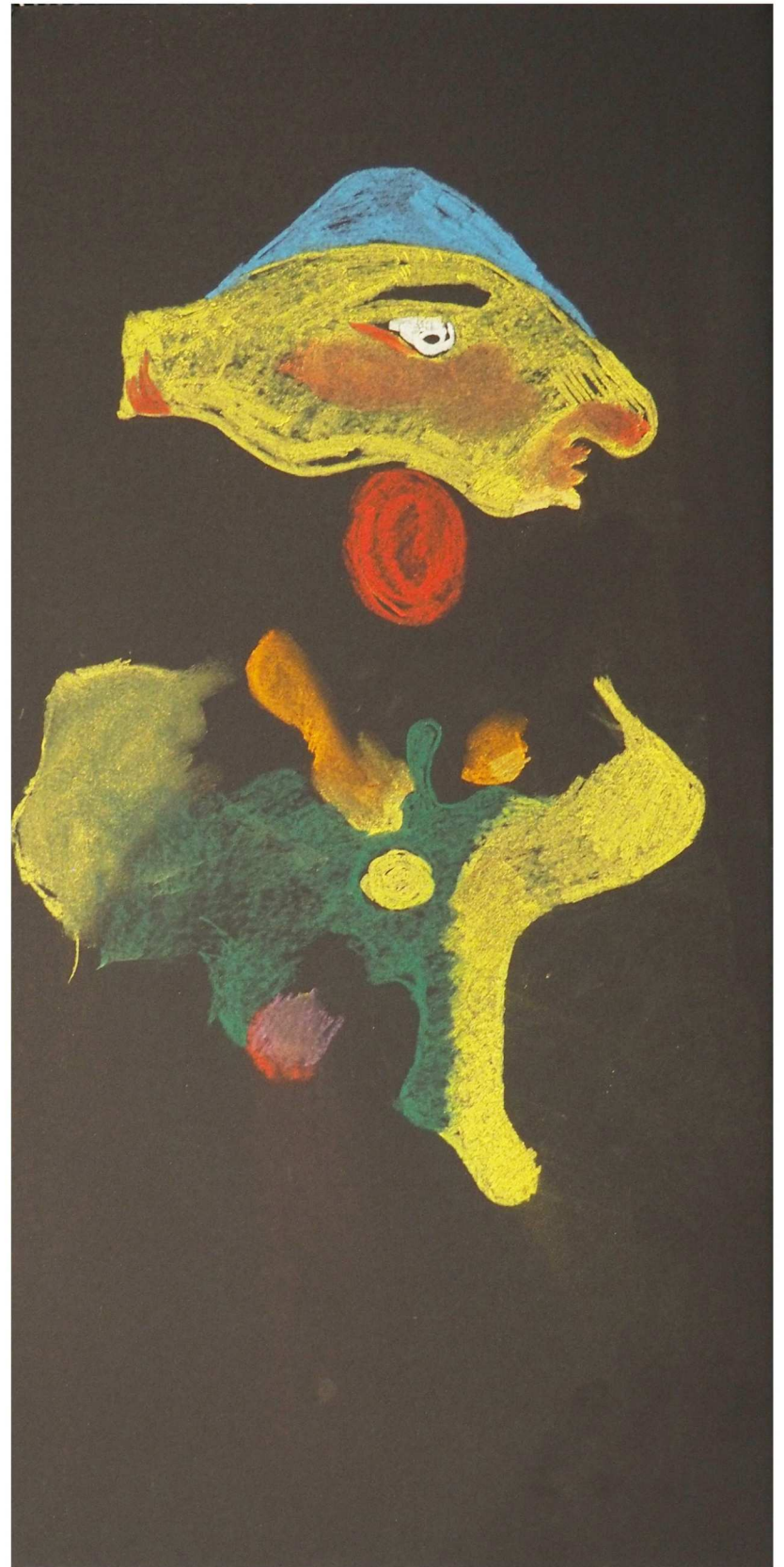
Joan Miro



Floyd Kuptana



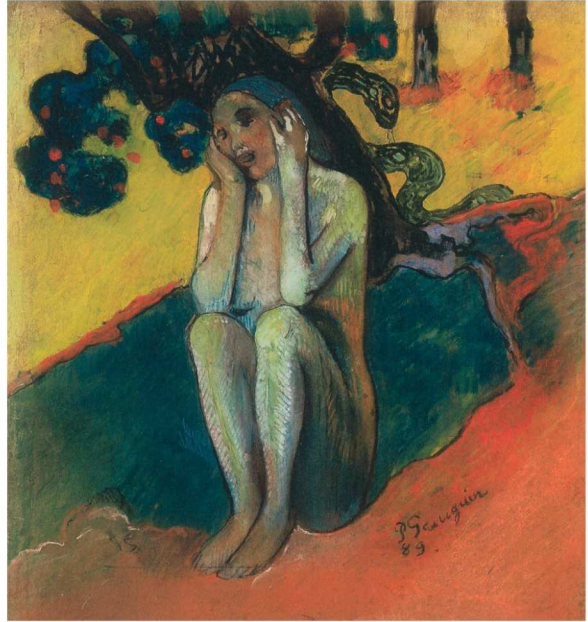
Deborah Harris



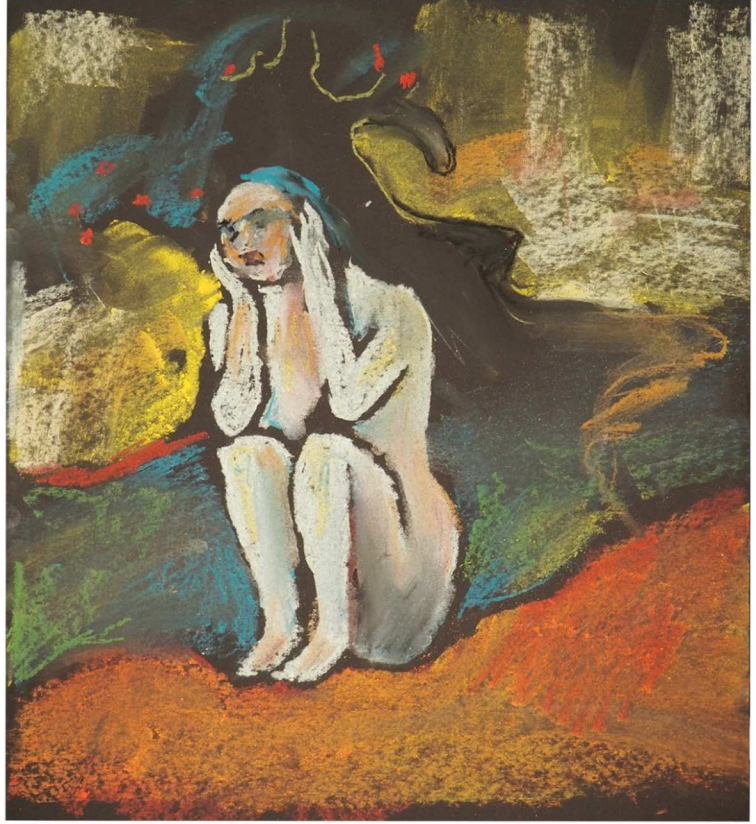
Sae Kimura



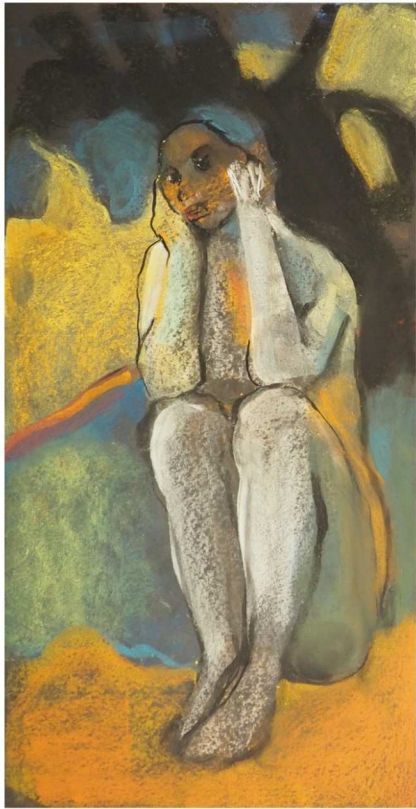
Floyd Kuptana



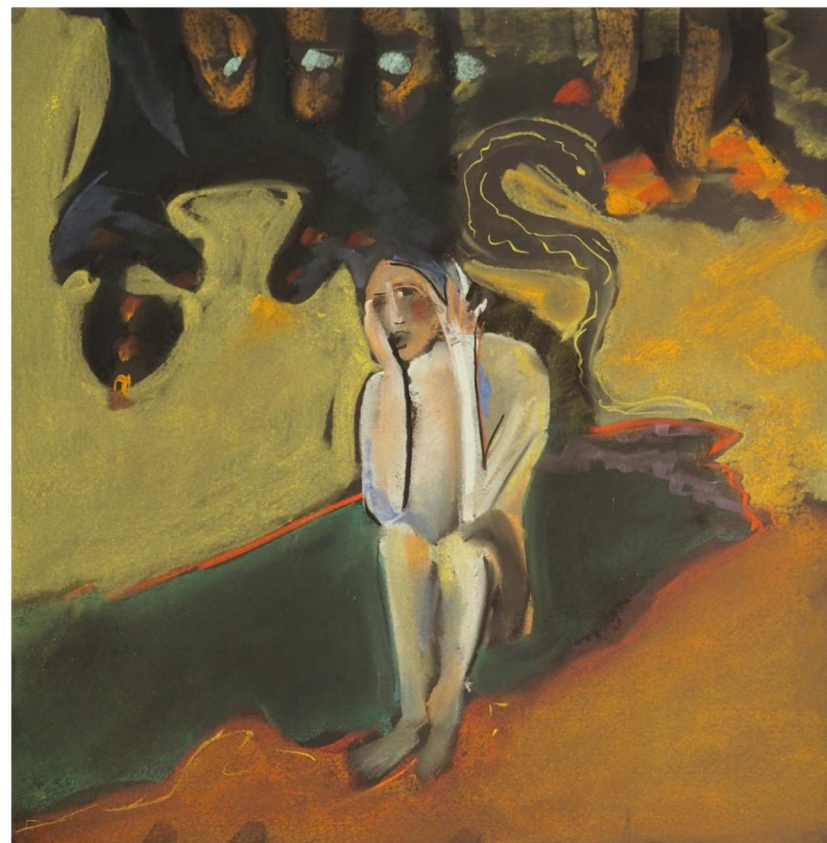
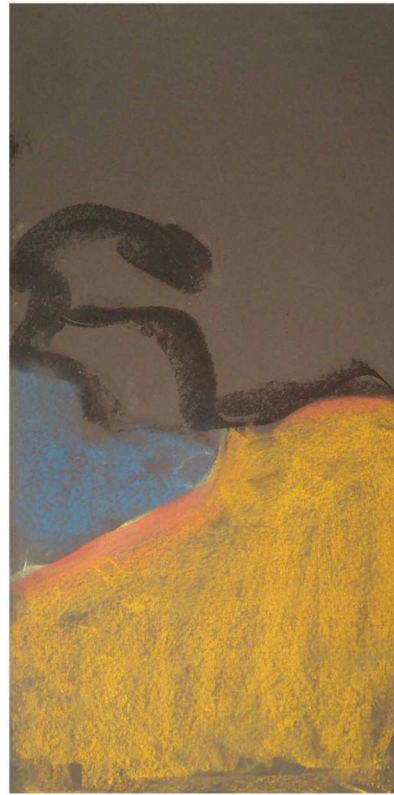
Paul Gauguin



Sae Kimura



Vivian Felsen



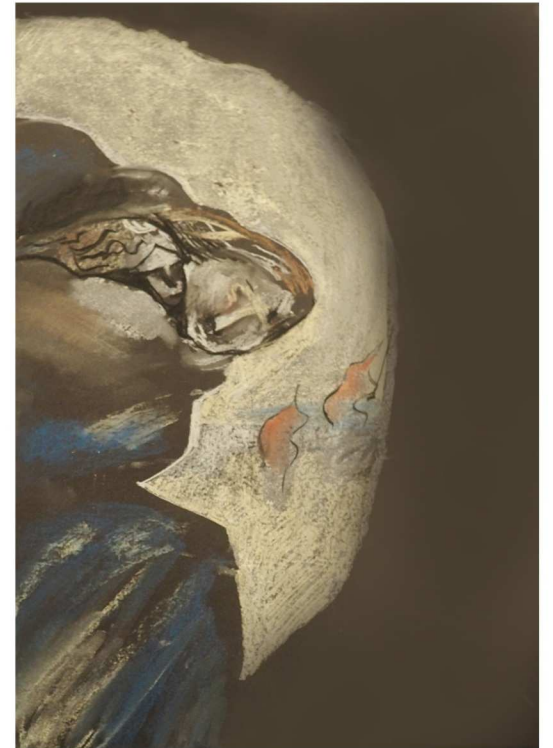
Deborah Harris



Floyd Kuptana



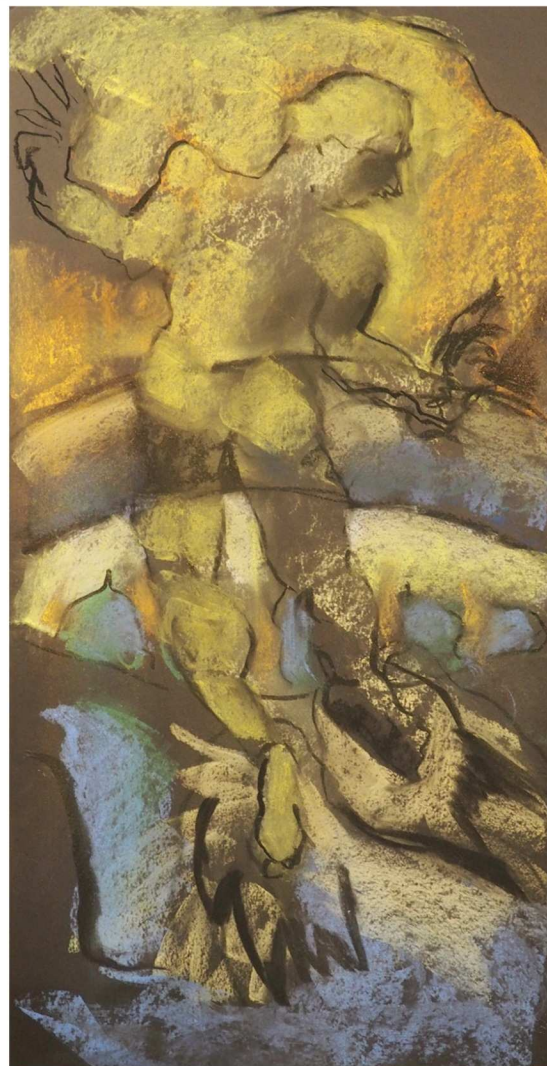
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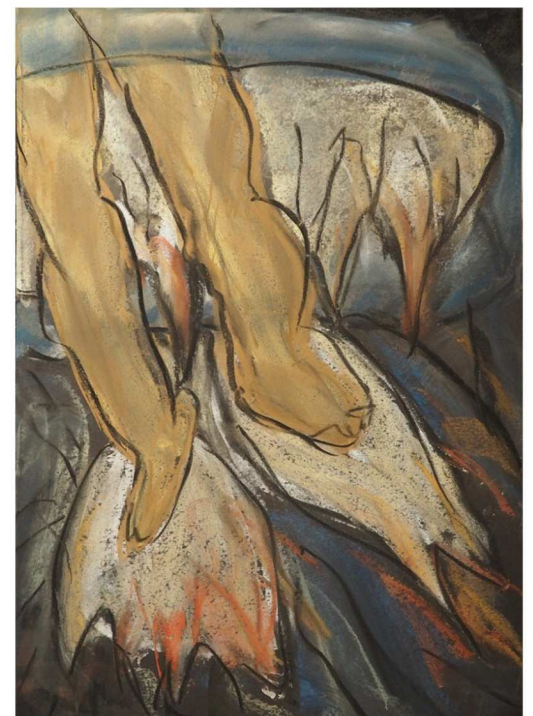
Deborah Harris



William Blake

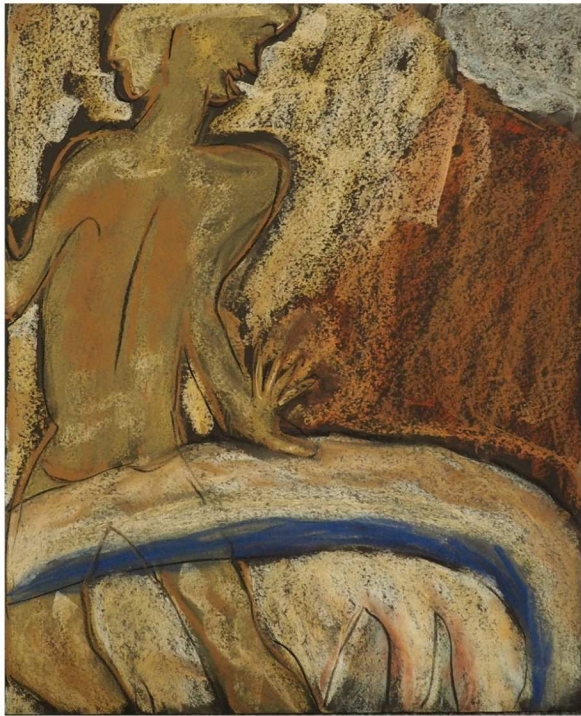


Vivian Felsen



Maya Rain

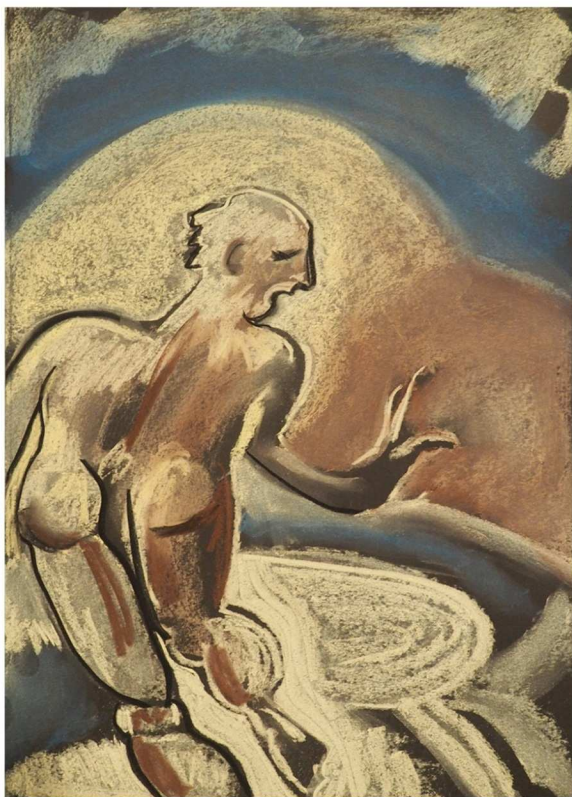




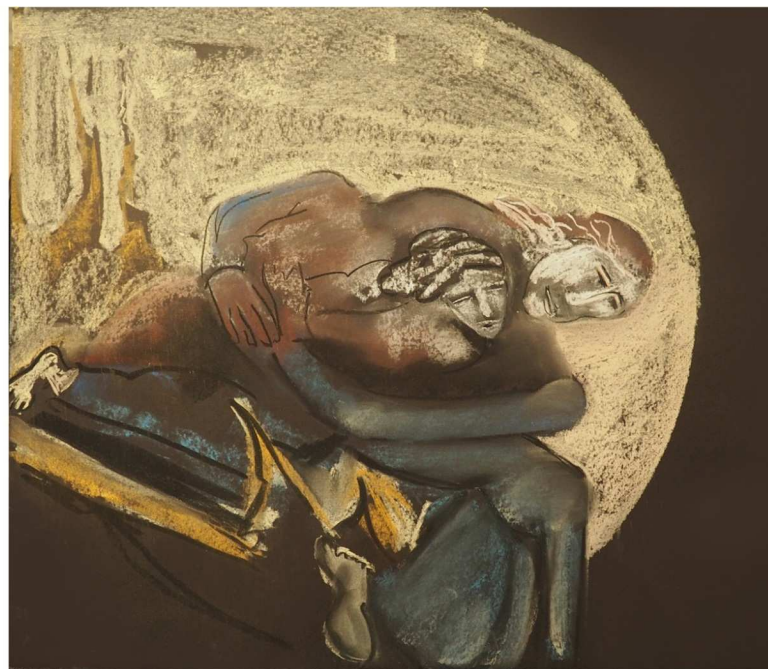
Maya Rain



William Blake



Deborah Harris



Deborah Harris



Deborah Harris



Paul Gauguin



Sae Kimura



Floyd Kuptana

The drawings shown here would not have happened except for the atmosphere and camaraderie of all of us at Gallery Arcturus.

It seems that there is an optimal number of people who, when gathered together, have sufficient energy to generate creativity. Not all of those present need to be drawing.

Eron was the official DJ, always finding the right music for the day.

Ed made sure each person received their preferred coffee.

Everyone at the gallery contributed their attention. These were joyful occasions.

We are all thankful.

It is our intention that the book share something of this experience with others, those who knew and appreciated Floyd and those who have never met him.

We hope that something of his essence will be revealed.

The book layout and design was done by Sae Kimura and Deborah Harris.

\*  
arcturus  
books







THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO  
FLOYD KUPTANA

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arcturus books