

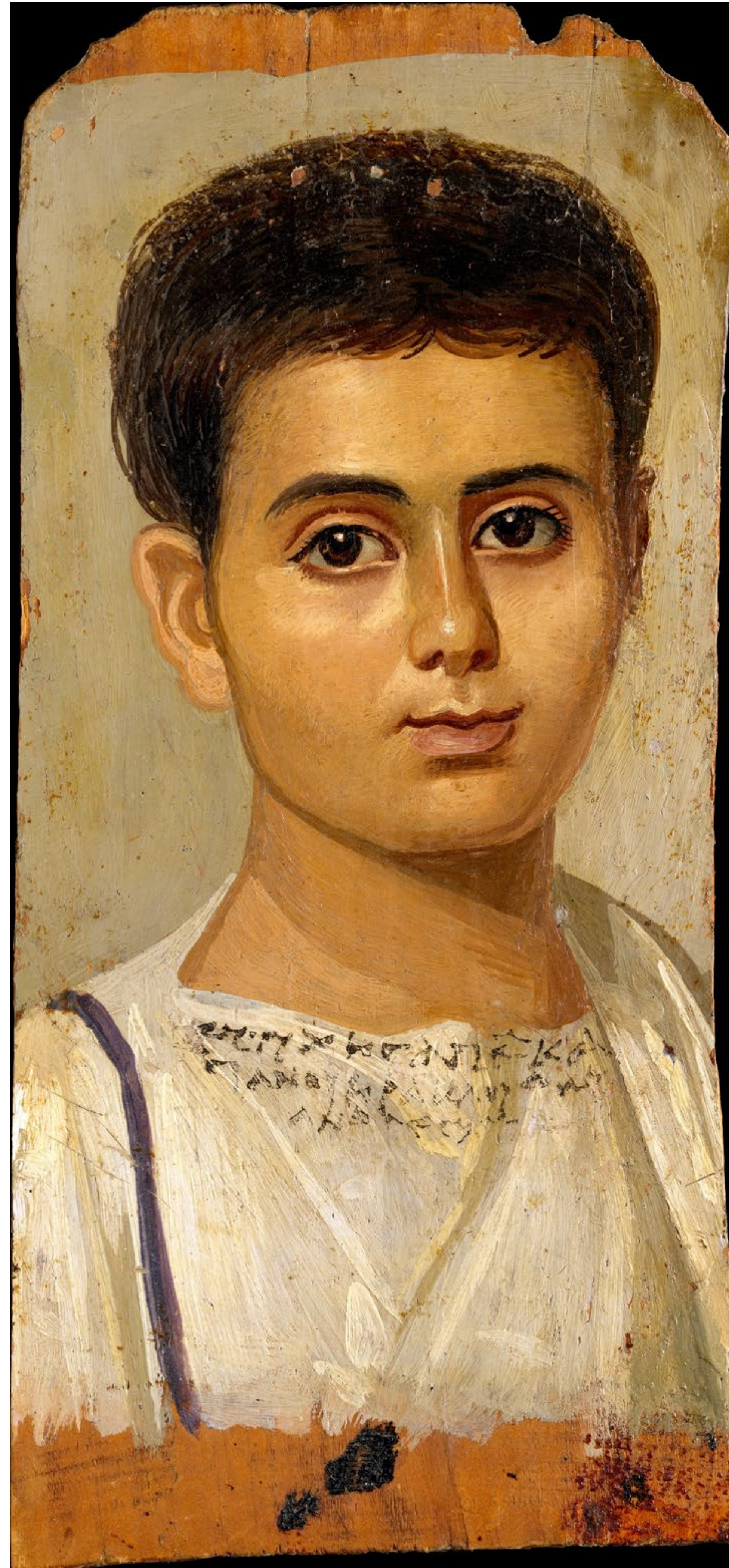
HUMDINGERS

JACOB VAN SCHALKWYK

22.12.2022 – 21.01.2023
Suburbia Contemporary, Barcelona.



Wonky Nights, Oil on canvas, 450 x 450mm, 2022



Portrait of the Boy Eutyches, Encaustic on wood, paint. 380 x 190mm, A.D. 100-150, Egypt, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.

I remember [*Portrait of the Boy Eutyches*](#) grabbing at the back of my knees long after I'd left the Metropolitan as a student visitor two decades ago now. It is an experience I was reminded of when visiting the Kelvingrove in Glasgow this October, at a time I was struggling for the sense I needed to complete the paintings that became *HUMDINGERS*.

Back in the super-fancy apartment on Victoria Crescent Road in Glasgow Juanita and I got to stay in for three months, clicking around for more information, I surfed into an exhibition dedicated to Roman-era Egyptian funerary panels at the Harvard Museum [on at the time](#). It made for profound (online) viewing. Through that exhibition, I found the Getty Institute's [conservation reports](#) on selected funeral portraits and I think a good grasp on the sense I needed to complete a group of paintings I'd embarked on at the beginning of the year in Cape Town.



Tetradenia riparia, Oil on canvas, 450 x 450mm, 2022

I was struck by how, given the material analysis of these portraits, the body of the work – I mean the material object in physical form – *is* the evidence. The mere presence of, for example, orpiment mixed with indigo in a number of these portraits has, according to the Getty, provided “startling new evidence for the archeological and historical record...setting its first appearance back as much as 500 years.”¹ To realise that what has been considered a particularly rare (and toxic) mineral was in fact available to Egyptian painters of funerary portraits significantly earlier than previously understood, I think becomes more profound as one begins to consider the societal structures necessary to make availability of that mineral *to artists* a possibility.

According to the Getty, around 69% of panels used were made of *Tilia europaea*, (lime/linden wood) most likely imported from Europe as it has never been native to Egypt.² Pigment analysis of examples by different artists in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago revealed a common limited palette of four basic pigments in the Greek *tetrachromatikon* system.^{3 (par 14)} A picture emerges where none of these portraits would have been possible without the sustained cross-cultural, multi-national bonds necessary to procure the materials required for their existence. Certainly, on a material level, art is a conditional space, not a given.

Further, that these artists were working in a mode or consciousness compossible *solely* through contact between Egyptian mummification rituals and the Greco-Roman/Byzantine painting tradition brings me back to appreciating art as a conditional space capable of, according to Badiou, doing “complete justice to the event.” [\(See p78\)](#)

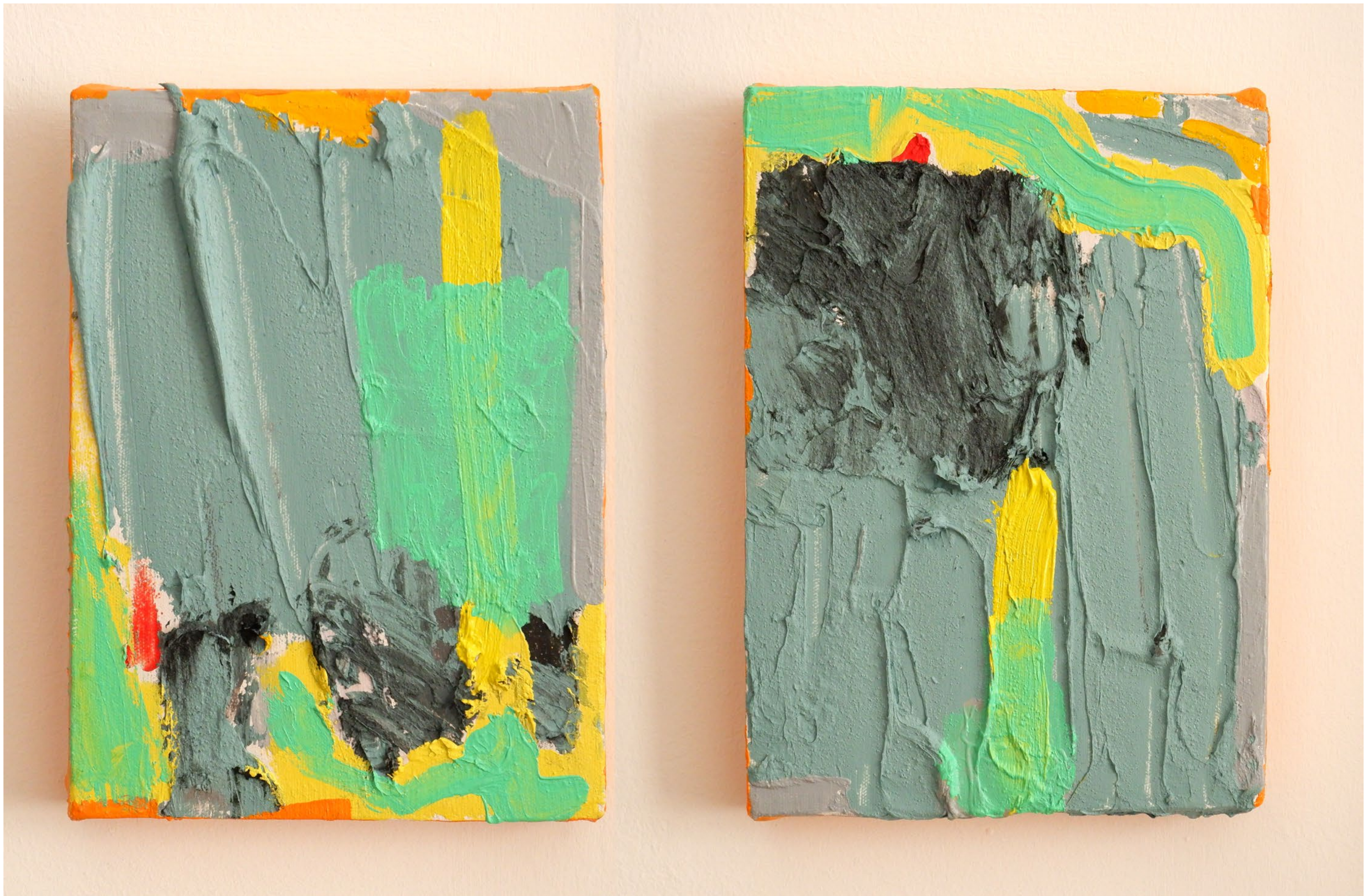
In this direction, the body *is* the evidence and *within itself* contains the possibility of justice, available to disburse and return to. I thought this idea resonated particularly with our artistic and societal present. Perhaps more prosaically but no less profound in my opinion, these marvelous portraits continue to inform us of ancient hairstyles, beards and adornments. They often depict the deceased in a younger stage of life than when they died. Perhaps justice can also be about returning us to what we feel we really look like, who we really are, what we were when we were ourselves, when we were together.



Golddiggers, Oil on canvas, Dyptich, 300 x 210mm, 2022

With *HUMDINGERS* concluding today, I'd like to thank Francesco Ozzola at Suburbia for his significant work in hosting the exhibition and taking care of the work. For schooling me on the use of beeswax in oil painting I should at least mention [Rod Freemantle](#), who's knowledge of the medium far exceeds my own. Thanks also to my old pal Jan-Henri Booyens, who handed me a tin of cold wax medium, encouraging me to try it out. When writing my artist statement for the show, an interview with [Edinson Cavani](#) helped me to formulate my feelings about art. It's a good read. Thanks for making it this far with me. Let's see each other around this year.

Best,
Jacob



Collect them all, Dyptich, oil on canvas, 300 x 210mm, 2022