

Our Dreams are a Second Life

HIBA KALACHE

Black and white works on archival paper, 300 g/m², 185 g/m²: acrylic ink, charcoal, pastels, and graphite

Works on verso of canvases: oil paint, oil stick, acrylic paint, acrylic ink, pastels, charcoal, graphite, spray paint, airbrush, house paint and street dust

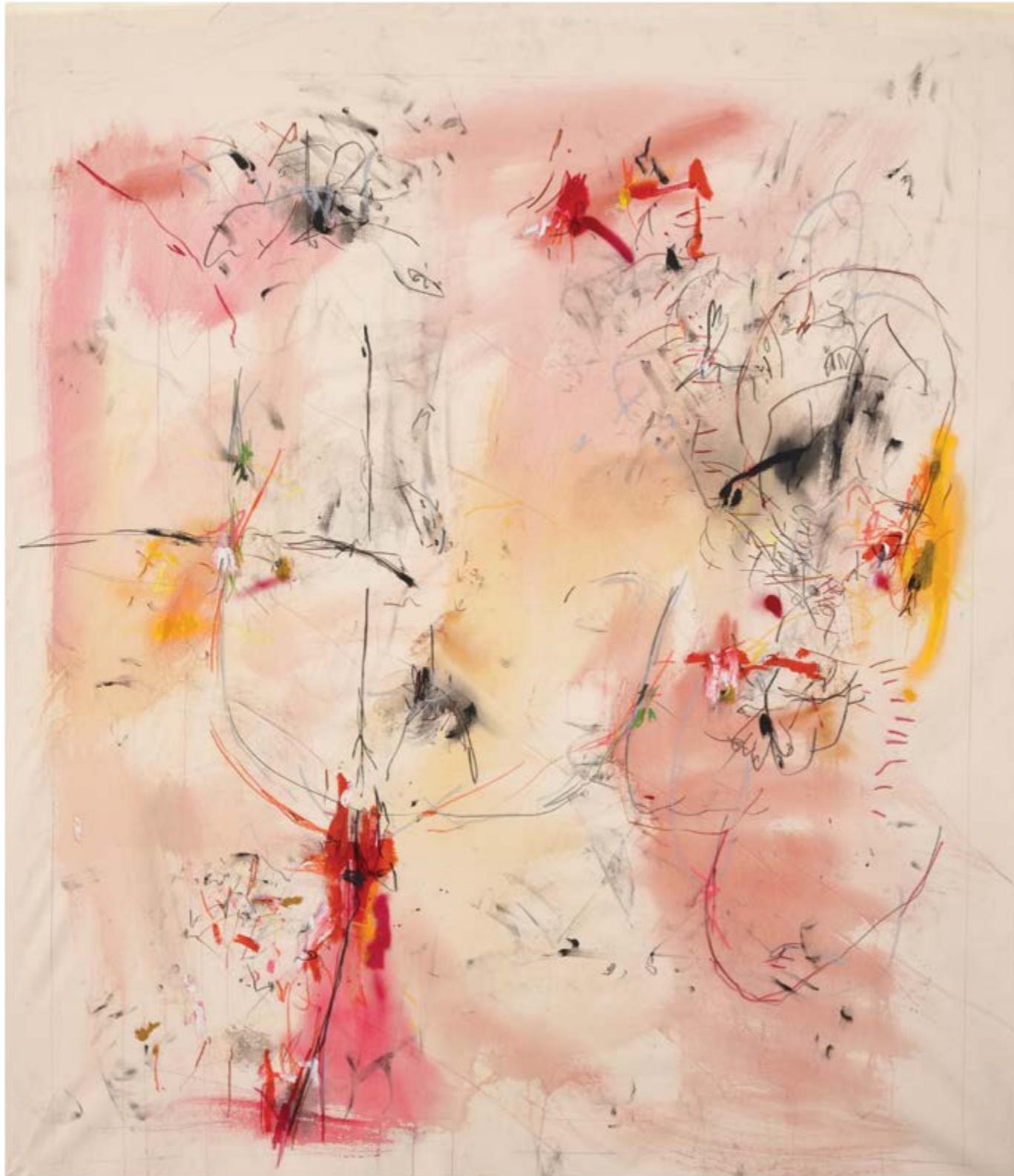
Floor sculpture, *stripped from its support*: raw canvases, bed sheets, pillow cases, oil stick, acrylic paint, acrylic ink, pastels, charcoal, and street dust

detail of *these were not ungraspable dreams but a frenzy of living hours. and in these fluid hours I witnessed wondrous things*, p24-25

Most titles are excerpted from *Year Of The Monkey*, Patti Smith

The artist in her studio, Beirut, March 2020





in silent gratitude, still alive | 125x107cm | 2020

[...] the function of the human foot consists in giving firm foundation to the erection of which man is so proud (the big toe, ceasing to grasp branches, is applied to the ground on the same plane as the other toes). But whatever the role played in the erection by his foot, man, who has a light head, in other words, a head raised to the heavens and heavenly things, sees it as spit, on the pretext that he has this foot in the mud.

– George Bataille, “The Big Toe” (1929)

The terrestrial globe is covered with volcanoes, which serve as its anus. Although this globe eats nothing, it often violently ejects the contents of its entrails.

– George Bataille, The Solar Anus (1927–1930)

In *Our Dreams are a Second Life*, Hiba Kalache presents a ragingly luminescent body of work that extends the themes and gestures of her recent practice in a new installation of paintings, drawings, and a sculptural intervention. The majority of the works on paper are framed, while most of the paintings are unmounted and unstretched. The tension between the framed drawings and the unstretched paintings serves to highlight the fragile, intimate, and intuitive writerly gesture that distinguishes all of Kalache’s artwork. Produced in a period of protracted sociohistorical and existential crises, this recent work is consonant with the times, even if only obliquely so. The show does not provide an overarching narrative, but it exposes our ambivalent desires toward present reality – at once a fantasy and a living nightmare. This ambivalence is evocative of the relationship between the sexual and the political.

Desire in Kalache’s work is figured in motifs and visions of erotic excess. Lines charge with bloodied reds and curve into tumescent bulges, some indefinite and others defined: belly, breast, cock, toe, thigh, anus, and eye. Her objects are partial, and of the order of the fetish: now you see them, now you don’t. The work gratifies the prurient and prudish viewer alike; the former disavows the abjectness of the deformed female body with multiple pregnant bellies and instead sees free-floating partial objects of another kind, while the latter sees neither body nor organs. Oscillating between automatism and intention, her brushstrokes conjure up exuberant rays of sunshine (in *I know that very well, one cannot ask for a life, or two lives*), leaky white jism (in *these were not ungraspable dreams but a frenzy of living hours. and in these fluid hours I witnessed wondrous things*), and smears of excrement (in *something buoyant pressing up, insisting on existence, like the birth of a poem or a small volcano erupting*). The sublime intermingles with the base to give way to a beauty that is not ideal but eroticized.

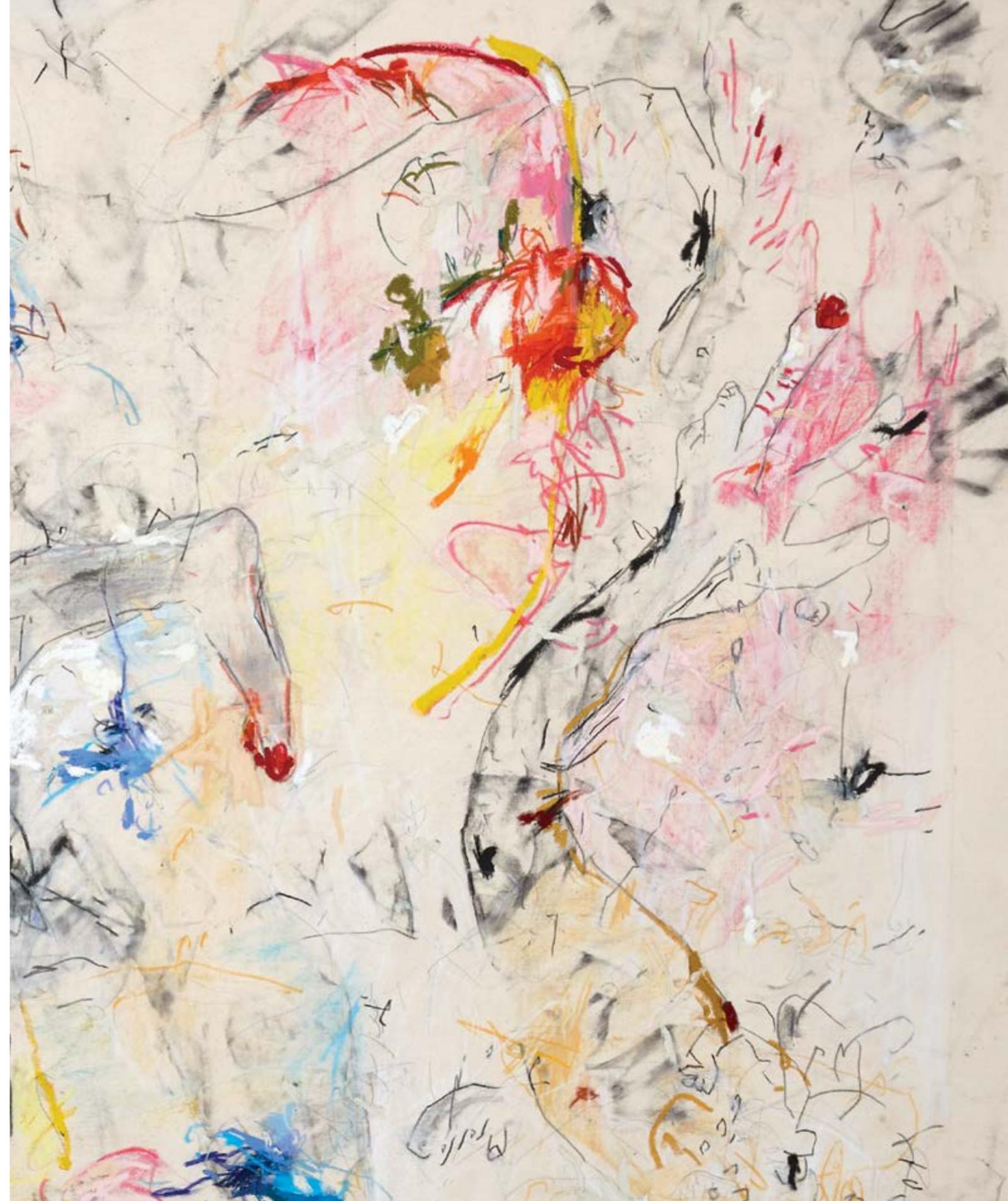
The toe, as prime *évoqueur* of the base, is of particular importance in Kalache's recent work. It is one of the exhibition's central motifs as well as a condition of viewership. "The big toe", remarks Georges Bataille, "is the most *human* part of the human body". It is the element that differentiates the human from the ape, as the former relies on it for firm grounding and an upright posture, while the latter still uses it to cling to branches. In contrast to the ape, the human has "raised [herself] straight up in the air like a tree". The distance assumed from the feet by the human head and sensory organs imbues the toe with associations of dirt and ugliness – the head is now seemingly but illusorily closer to the divine and further from the odorous regions of the human body. In *Our Dreams are a Second Life*, the works are situated at levels both high and low within the space and are to be seen from erect, stooped, and squatted positions. These three positions suggested by the placement of the works rely on the big toe for stability, but two out of the three positions bring the head closer to the feet. The foot, which is the condition of the uprightness of the viewer, is deprecated as base. At the same time, it has a seductive appeal and is fetishized precisely because of its baseness and occasional deformations.

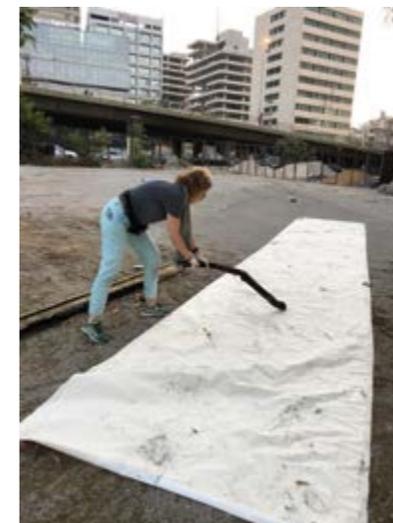
This is arguably most pronounced in *a lot of rough things happened, begetting things even more terrible*. On the unstretched canvas, several legs and feet clearly come into view. Two legs in particular hover on the picture plane as if in midair, one in the center with a downward facing foot and the other extending along the length of the right edge of the painting (in the latter, foot and thigh uncomfortably double as hand and arm). The striking red polish adorning the toenails of the first foot in the center is fetching to the viewer. It soon becomes apparent, though, that the varnish is (also) blood seeping from underneath the nails which horrifically colors the toes. The hesitant lines connecting the foot to the leg suggest something even more terrible – a broken leg where shin and calf are swapped. What was briefly beautiful now appears deformed. The toes (or hands) of the other foot (or arm) are even more strange. The little and ring toes are stunted, and the nail of the middle toe is chipped and bloody. Stretched out wide apart, the toes fail to plant the foot on stable ground. The struggle for grounding is further animated by charcoal-like streaks of street dirt beaming as if from the toes. Kalache wiped the streets with her canvases during the months-long uprising beginning on October 17, 2019, and the resulting marks were later blended with charcoal and colored inks.

Our Dreams are a Second Life is marked by a fundamental ambiguity between the whole and the part, the ideal and the base, the political and the sexual. This ambiguity exposes the ambivalence at the core of desire, not least that of the viewer. Does desire diagnose the problem or offer solutions? The magnified ambivalence of desire in the artist's recent work does not serve the exultant claim that the sexual is political; it points to its inverse, that the political is sexual. Consider the slogan graffitied on the walls of Beirut last year: "Sex is good, but have you ever fucked the system?" In the slogan, as much as in Kalache's work, the question remains: How do we fuck the system?

Natasha Gasparian - 2020

detail of *a lot of rough things happened, begetting things even more terrible*





Beirut, October 2019



and they were much more than dreams, as if originating from the dawn of the mind | 150x115cm | 2019



certain that we, as the seasons, prevail | 150x115cm | 2019

there are many truths,
and there are many worlds

150x115cm | 2019





allowing something else to unfold. something negligible, light and entirely unexpected | 150x115cm | 2019



you don't see things like that. you feel them | 150x115cm | 2019



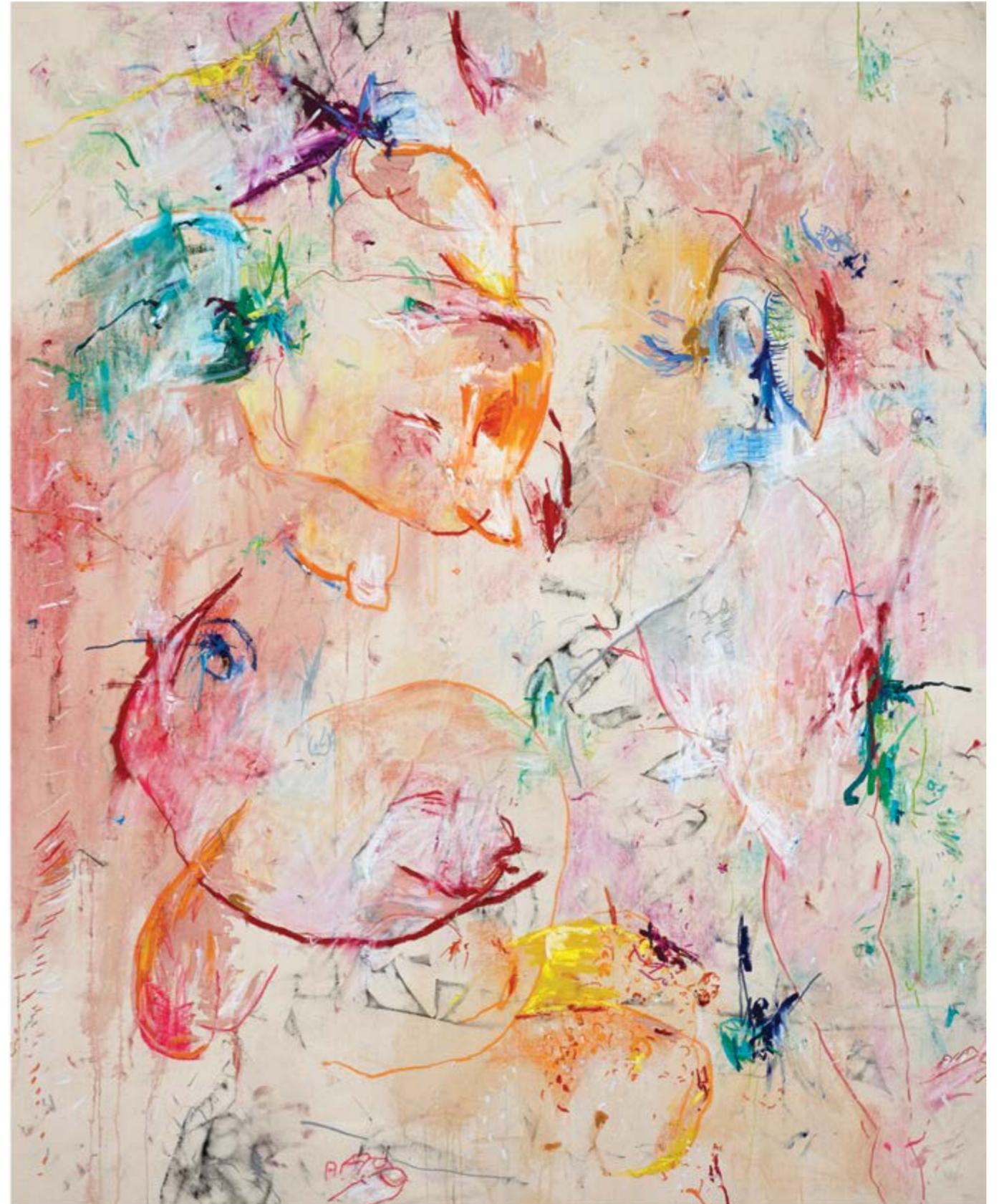
I longed for buds sprouting,
doves cooing,
darkness lifting,
spring returning

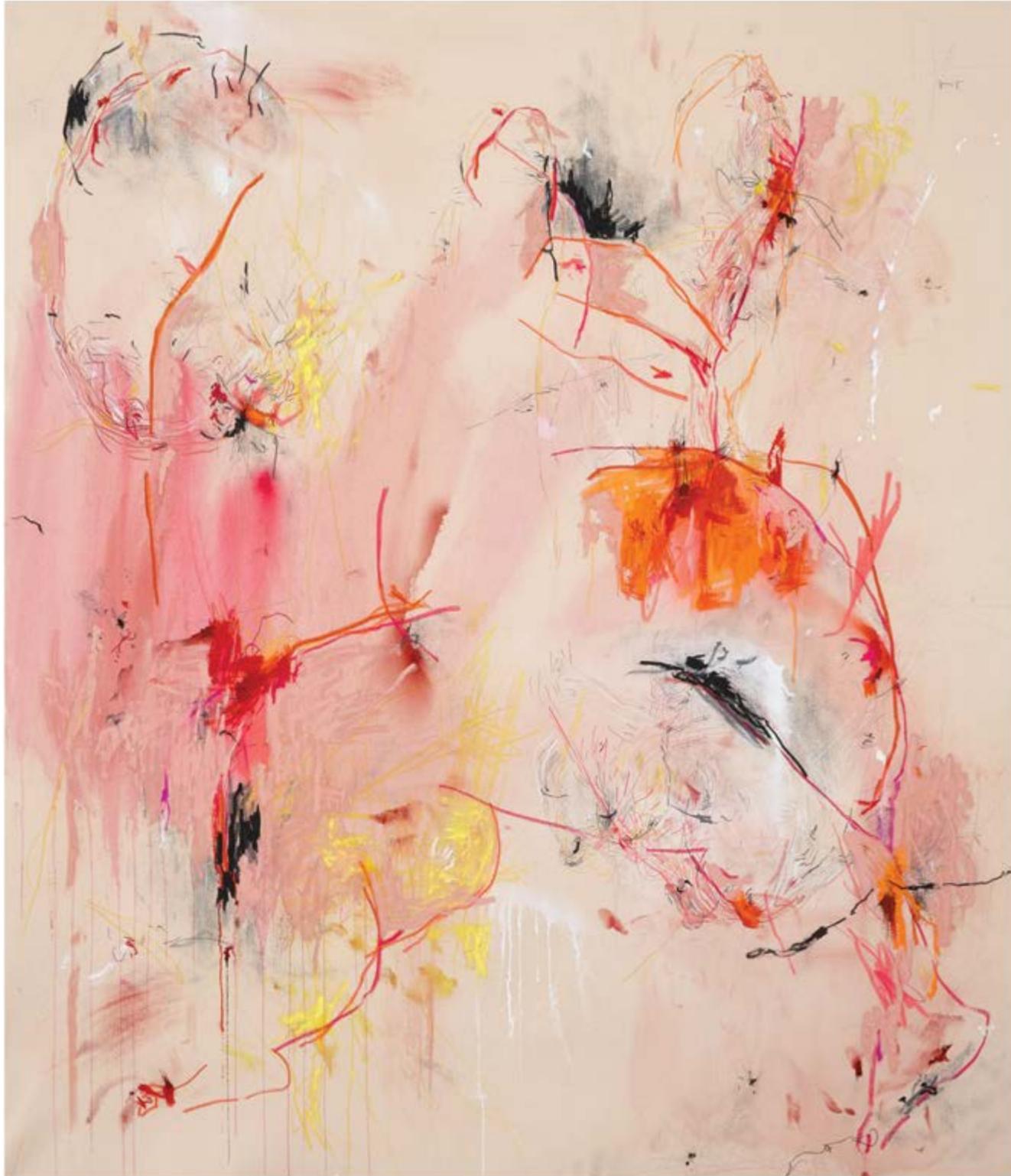
182x150cm | 2020



it was all so close,
the rays of the sun,
the sweetness,
a sense of time lost forever

182x150cm | 2020





as it goes, so do we | 125x107cm | 2020



the clouds were pink and dropped from the sky | 127x107cm | 2020



I try to be more aware of the passing hours,
that I might see it happen,
that cosmic shift from one digit to another

148x174cm | 2020



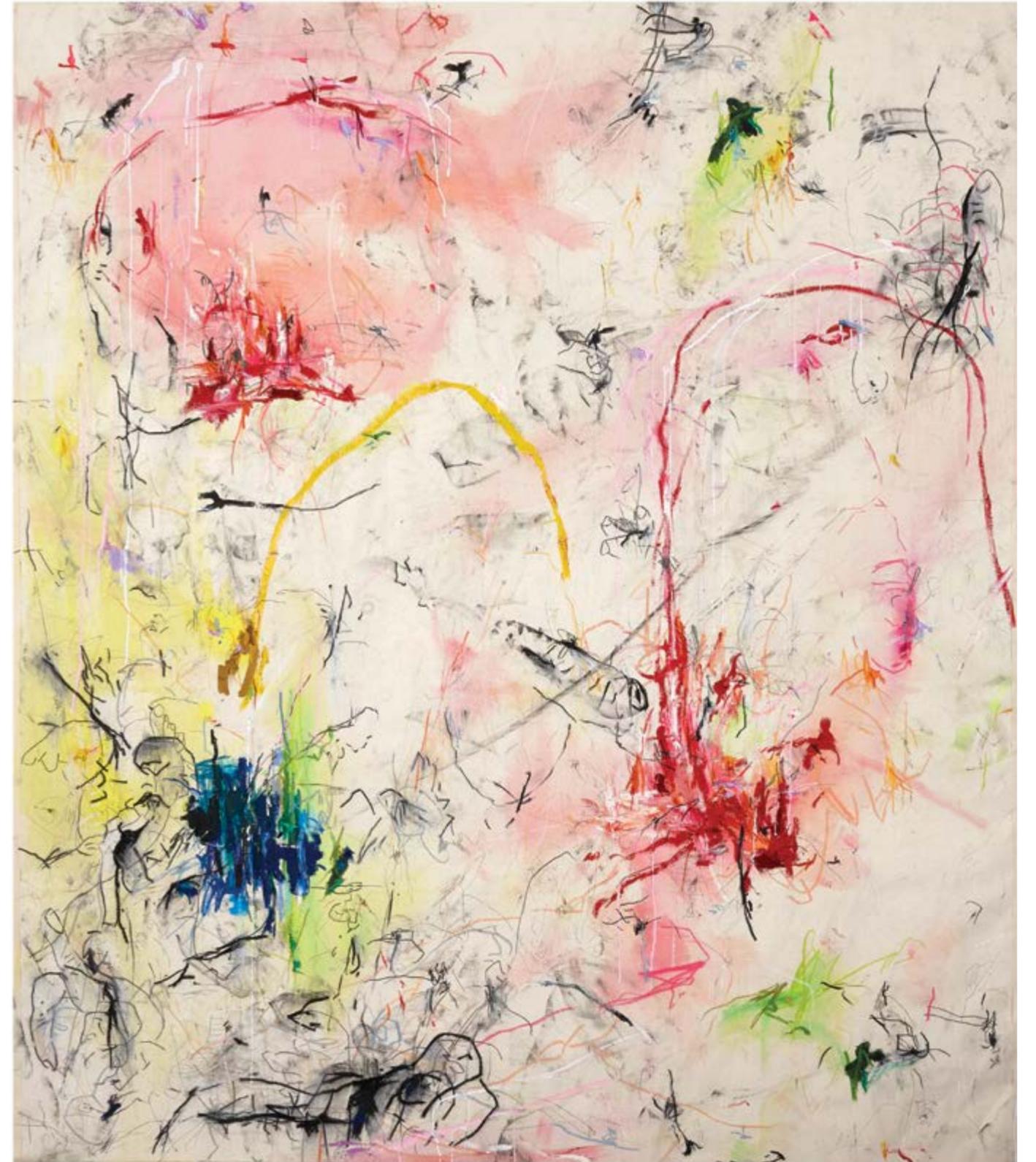


a lot of rough things happened,
begetting things even more terrible

148x174cm | 2020

time has a way of still going,
ticking away,
new things one cannot alter,
cannot get down fast enough

174x148cm | 2020



something buoyant pressing up,
insisting on existence,
like the birth of a poem
or a small volcano erupting

174x148cm | 2020





cycles of death
and resurrection,
but not always
in the way we imagine

148x210cm | 2020

the trouble with dreaming
is that we eventually wake up

148x174cm | 2020



I know that very well,
one cannot ask for a life,
or two lives

174x148cm | 2020





the dreams of water

210x150cm | 2020





as if with a heartbroken vengeance

145x120cm | 2020



I could feel the gravitational pull 1
65x102cm | 2020



I could feel the gravitational pull 2
65x102cm | 2020



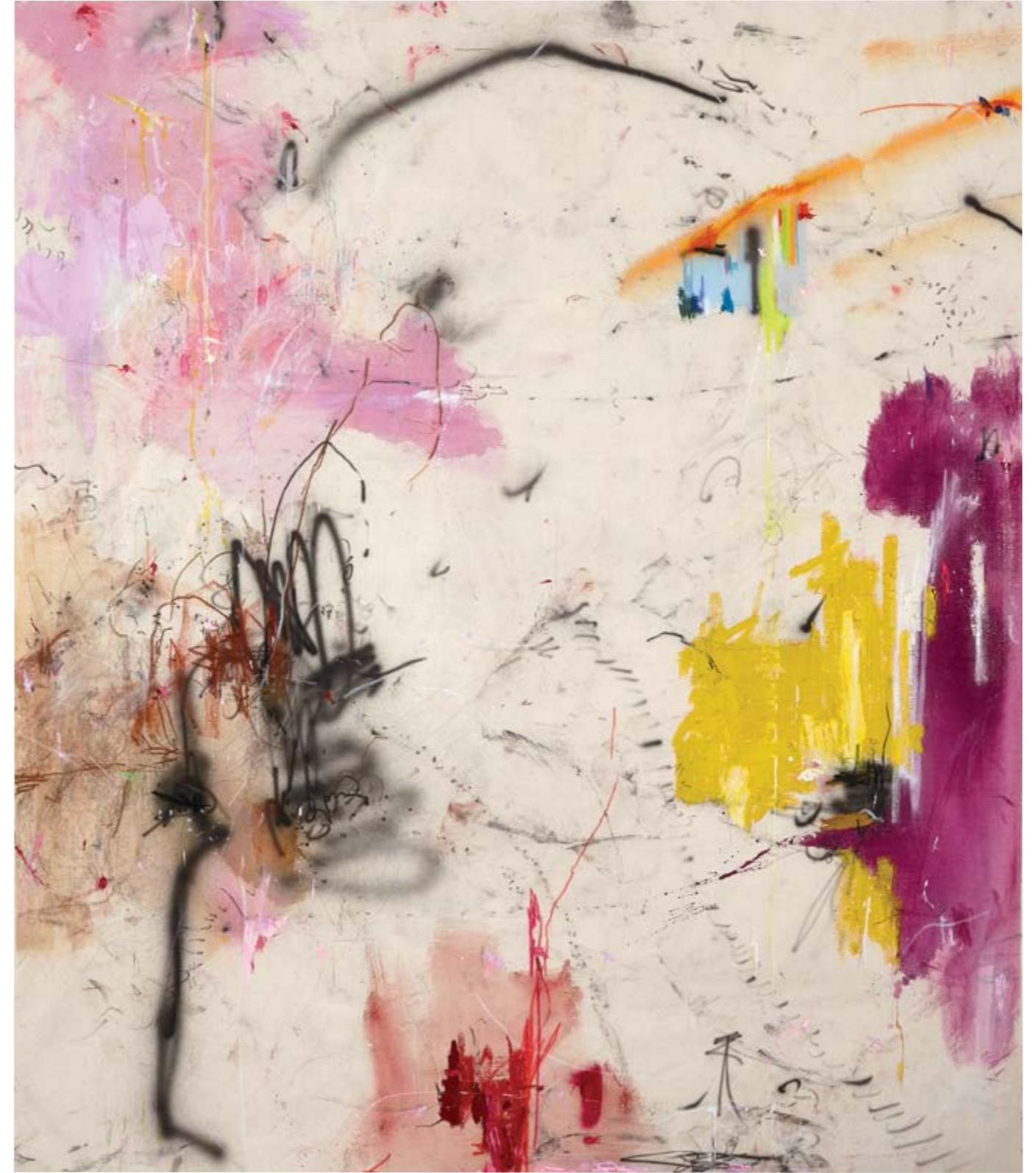
some dreams aren't dreams at all,
just another angle of physical reality

each 76x56cm | 2020



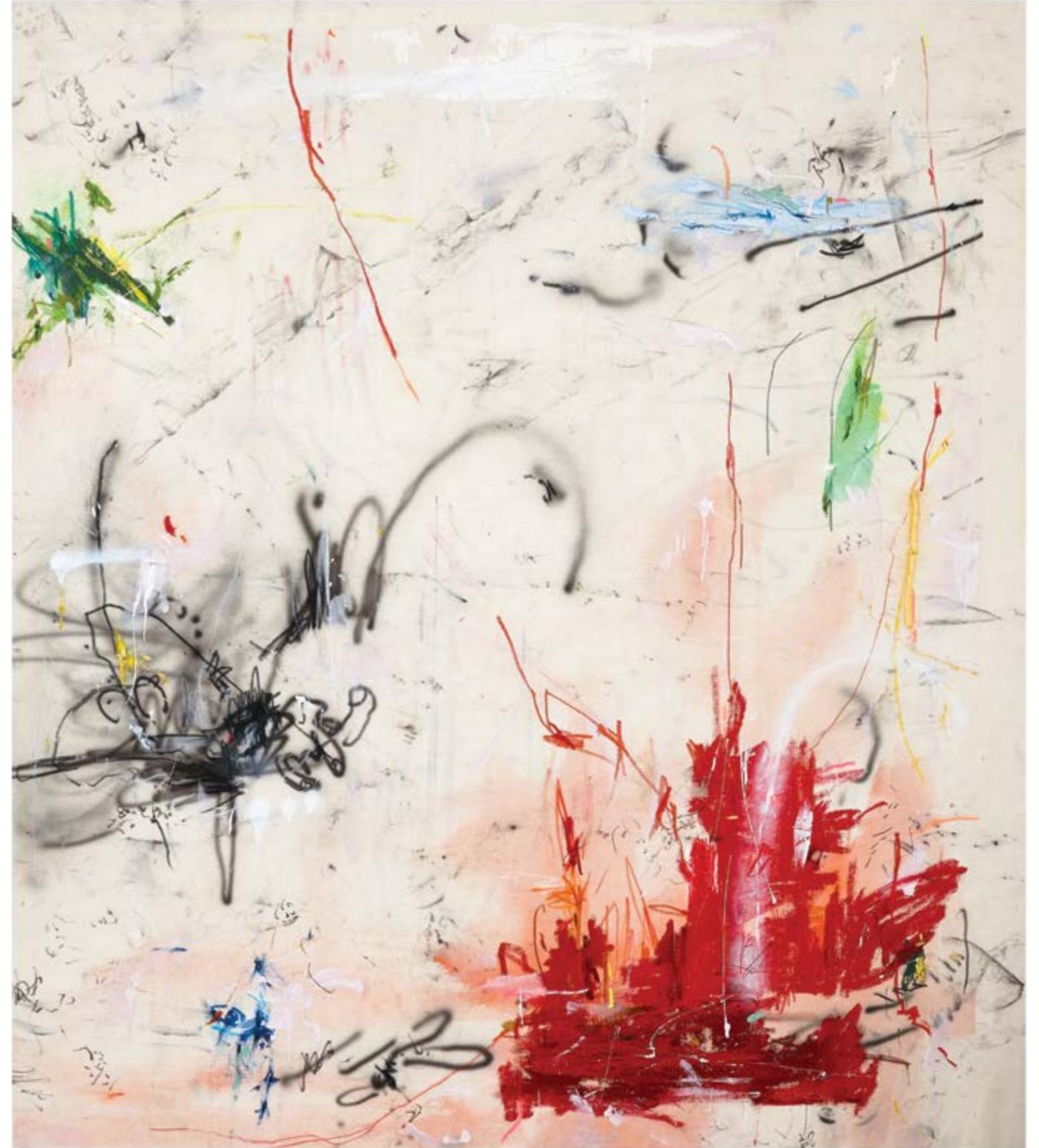
and there was the future that came and went

150x130cm | 2020



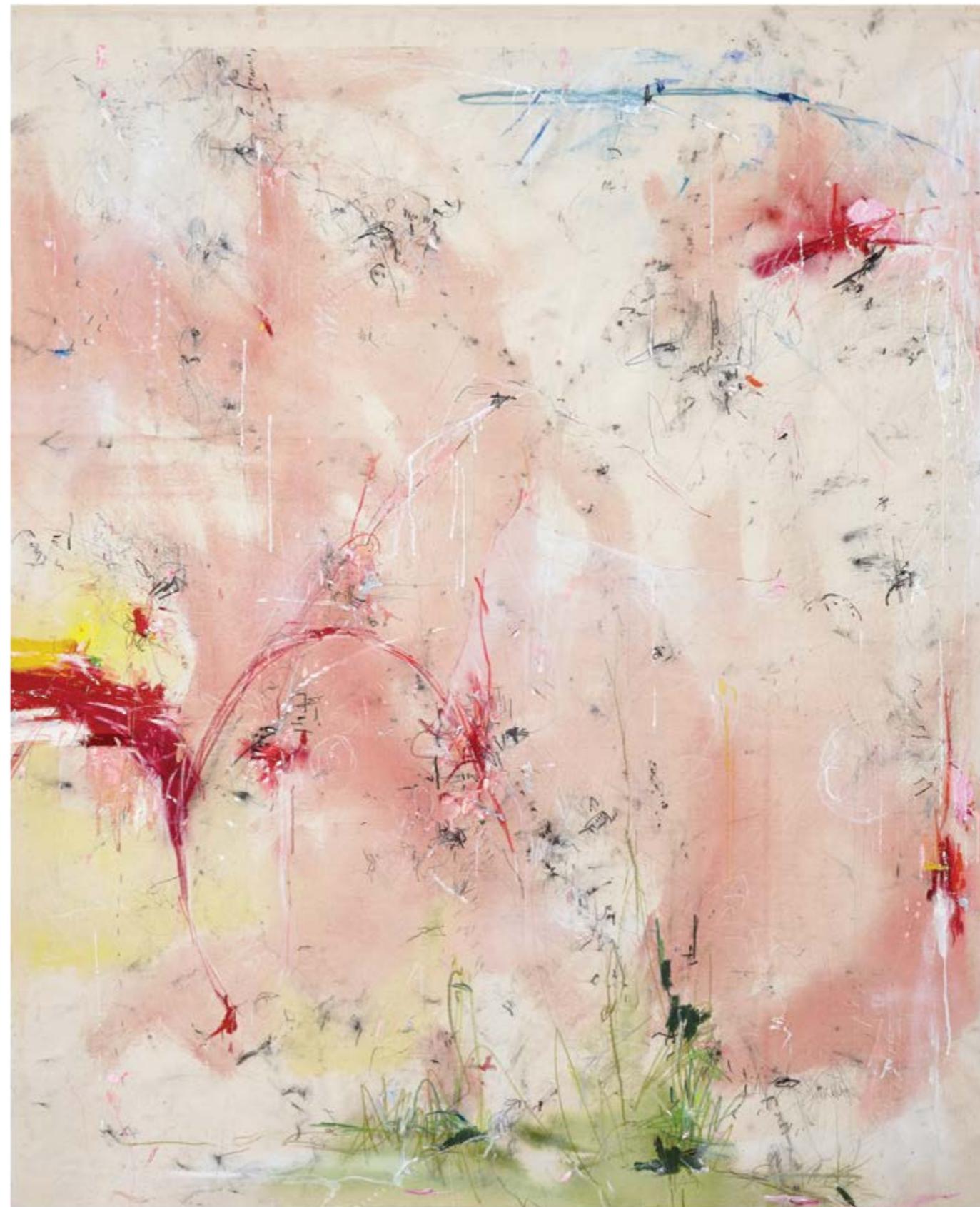
a good or bad sign?
considering the state of the world,
who could tell the difference?

150x130cm | 2020



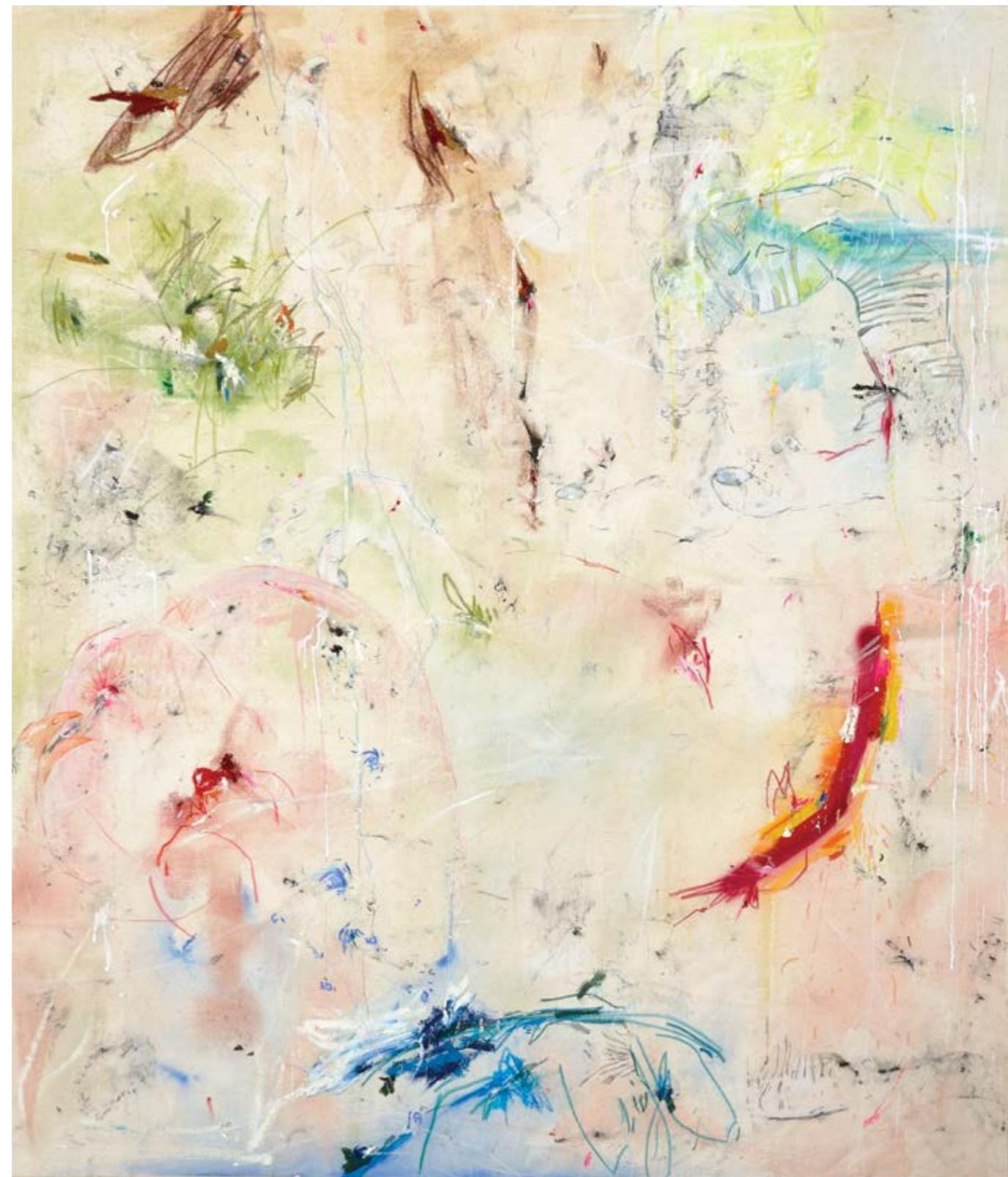
with feathers the color of the sun

150x130cm | 2020



suddenly the sea was no longer the sea,
but the backdrop for words

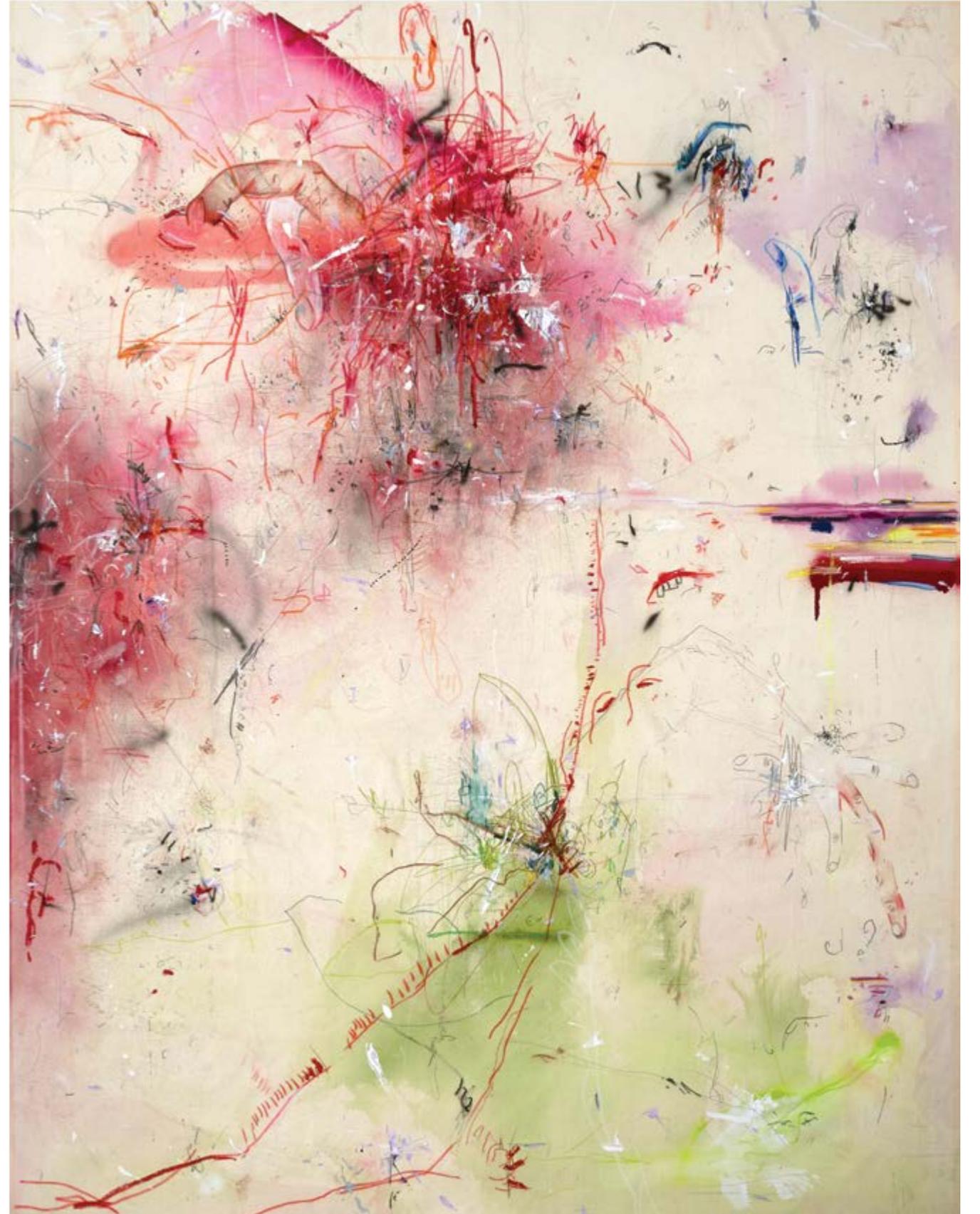
150x130cm | 2020





a mortal folly comes over the world

188x148cm | 2020

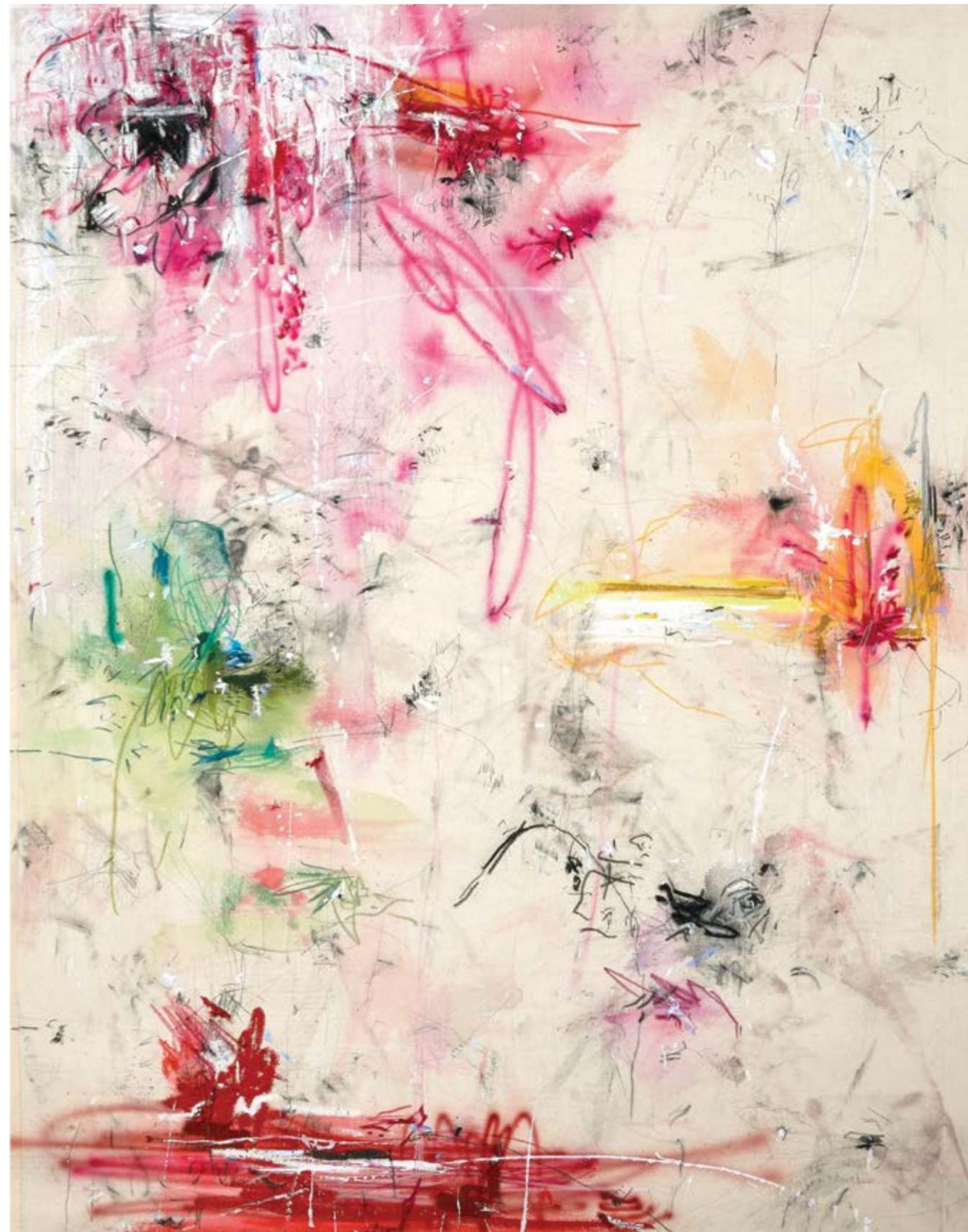


our quiet rage gives us wings
150x150cm | 2020



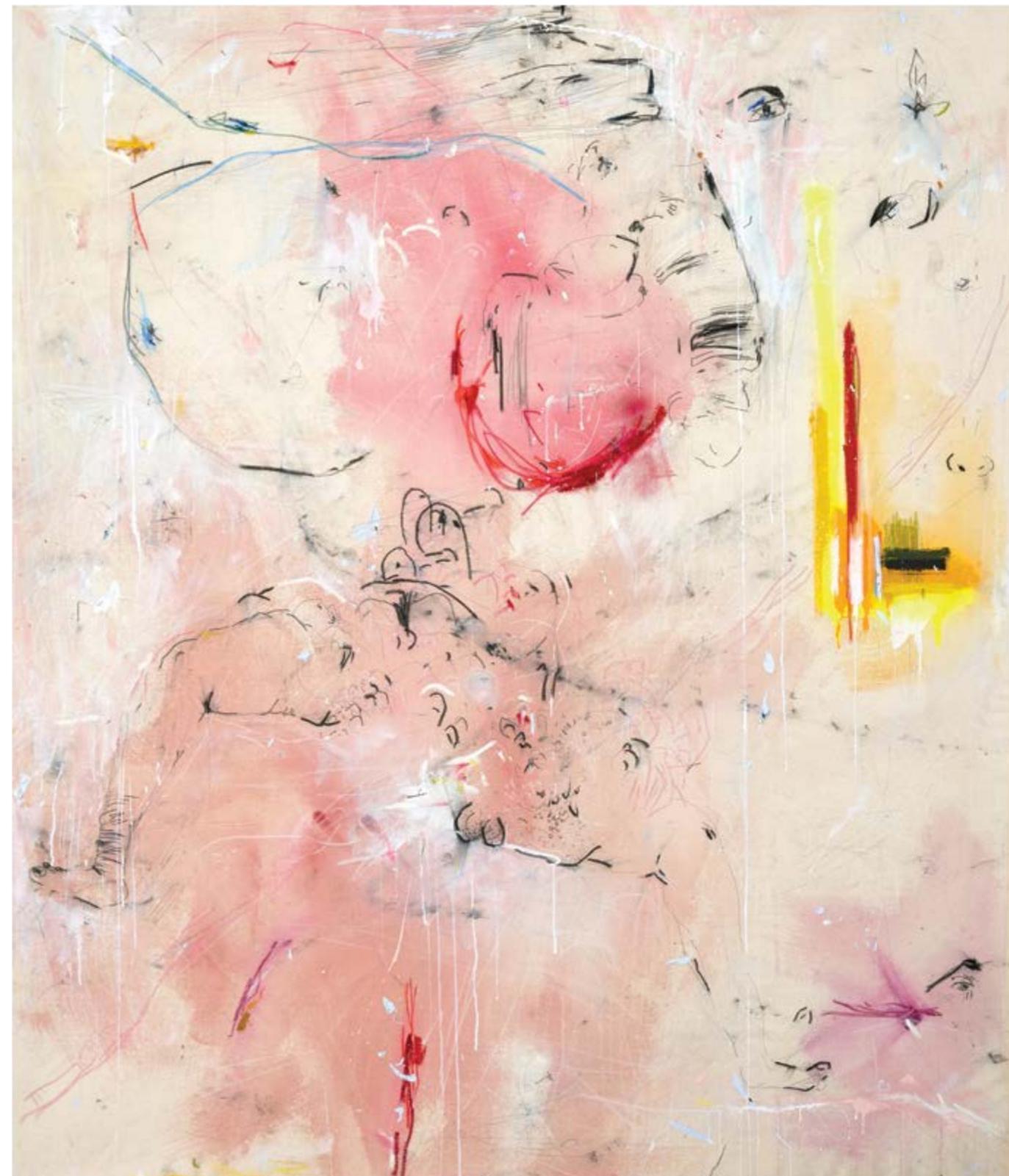
these are the times that try men's souls

150x120cm | 2020



I sat in the center of my own disorder

150x130cm | 2020



it hung heavy in the atmosphere,
as anxious hearts merged with anxious hearts

150x125cm | 2020



these were not
ungraspable dreams
but a frenzy
of living hours.
and in these fluid hours
I witnessed
wondrous things

150x245cm | 2020



Hiba Kalache is an interdisciplinary artist whose practice spans installation, drawing, painting, sculpture and interactive projects. Kalache draws on her daily life for her materials, process and content. She interrogates the separation between the private and public spheres, and more specifically, what she calls, “the banality of daily rituals”. Her recent interests include female desire and the abject in relation to truth, and the possibility of positing futurity in an era of perpetual presentism. In *Our Dreams are a Second Life*, Hiba Kalache presents a body of work that extends the themes and gestures of her recent practice. Produced in a period of protracted sociohistorical and existential crises, this work is subtly consonant with the times.

In 2005, Kalache received a Master of Fine Arts degree from California College of the Arts (CCA) in San Francisco. She has since exhibited in Beirut, Berlin, Brussels, Istanbul, New Orleans, Oakland, San Jose (USA), San Francisco, Tehran, Athens, London and Paris. Her work has also been shown at art fairs including Art Dubai, Drawing Now (Paris), and Gwangju Art (South Korea).

Kalache’s recent exhibitions include *Encounters – ongoing* (2020) at The Upper Gallery at Saleh Barakat Gallery, *Lemonade Everything Was So Infinite* (2018), a solo exhibition curated by Natasha Gasparian at Saleh Barakat Gallery, *Mimesis Expression Construction* (2016) curated by Octavian Esanu at the American University of Beirut’s Rose and Shaheen Saleeby Museum, *Heartland* (2015) curated by Joanna Chevalier at the Beirut Exhibition Center, and *Under Construction, Exposure* (2014) curated by Marie Muracciole at the Beirut Art Center. In 2012, she had solo shows in Beirut with The Running Horse Contemporary Art Space, and the FFA Private Bank. In 2017, she taught fine arts at the Lebanese American University.

Natasha Gasparian is an art historian and critic who works on modern and contemporary art in the Arabic-speaking world. She holds a BA in Art History and an MA in Art History and Curating, from the American University of Beirut. She has received several academic awards from the American University of Beirut and was twice granted The Maria Geagea Arida Award in 2017 and 2018 by The Association for the Promotion and Exhibition of Art in Lebanon. Gasparian has collaborated on writing, research, and curatorial projects with institutions in Beirut, Lebanon, including Agial, AUB Art Galleries, Beirut Art Center, Saleh Barakat Gallery, and the Saradar Collection. She curated the solo exhibitions of Hiba Kalache, *Lemonade Everything was so Infinite* (Saleh Barakat Gallery, 2018) and of Ziad Abillama, *The Twisted Wing of the Airplane King* (Saleh Barakat Gallery, 2017). She is the author of *Commitment in the Artistic Practice of Aref El-Rayess* (Anthem Modern and Contemporary Art of the Arab World, Iran and Turkey, 2020).



In loving memory of dad

Acknowledgments

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SALEH BARAKAT GALLERY

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