

## **SHAWKI YOUSSEF**

FIVE SIDES BUT ONE ENTRANCE



## Five Sides But One Entrance

The task of painting is the attempt to render visible forces that are not themselves visible, in other words following Paul Klee's famed dictum, "not to render the visible, but to render visible". Yousset's works brings the haptic practice of painting and its matter of fact into the visual registers that teeter between the delicate and the caustic. Dark ominous blues and purples meet sharp burst of whites, reds, and yellows, while the canvas folds in on itself, torn as it meets the artist's cutter, pressed in, stretched out, pulled back and finally standing free. From the free-standing paintings to the ethereal yet brutal compositions on paper encased in glass, the artist's works encapsulate a critical constellation suturing the gesture, the context and the history of art. Indexical references to Francis Bacon's Screaming Pope and Rembrandt's Slaughtered Ox are suspended in the pull of forceful compositions, while the fragility of materials is exploited calling into question the function of art in a time charged with crisis. Peeling through the surfaces of his works in a hallucinatory succession, Youssef's constructions unveil a new sublime in exploiting the painterly mark, the texture as creased skins revealing the infinitude of the limits of materials. The work makes visible conversations between the organic and the geometric. Driven by the artistic tools of production, paint, and canvas, the series conjures the artist's gesture into constructions that exhibit the careful roughness of this labor. Standing before this work and following each line of construction, paint mark, and fold means following Youssef into his studio. Each physical gesture whose process of construction produces arresting transparencies, layers, folds and marks, brings canvas and paper forward and backwards at once. Here, the gesture, as an event, becomes an object in its absolute uniqueness. The artist discovers himself within the risk of a leap into the unknown. The unrepeatable act in each moment of projection, construction and deconstruction establishes a truth in painting as always already repainting. Moving from the physical to the phenomenological, the works open up a special kind of spatiality that denies the viewer imagined physical entry. This kind of space can be traversed with tactility and visuality. Youssef's work invites the viewer to peer around, through and behind the multifarious surface. To paraphrase the words of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, painting is not a reflection of acquired truth but an act of bringing truth into being.

> Andrea Comair May, 2023

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Mixed media on canvas | 206 x 145 cm | 2023 (RECTO)

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Mixed media on canvas | 171 x 138 cm | 2023 (RECTO)

(VERSO)

7





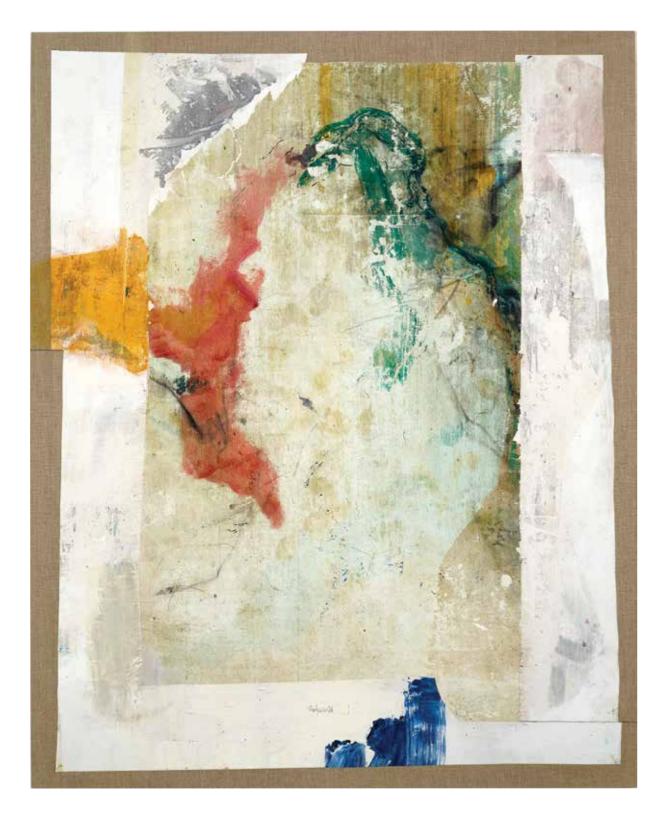
Mixed media on canvas | 174 x 91 cm | 2023 (RECTO)

(VERSO)

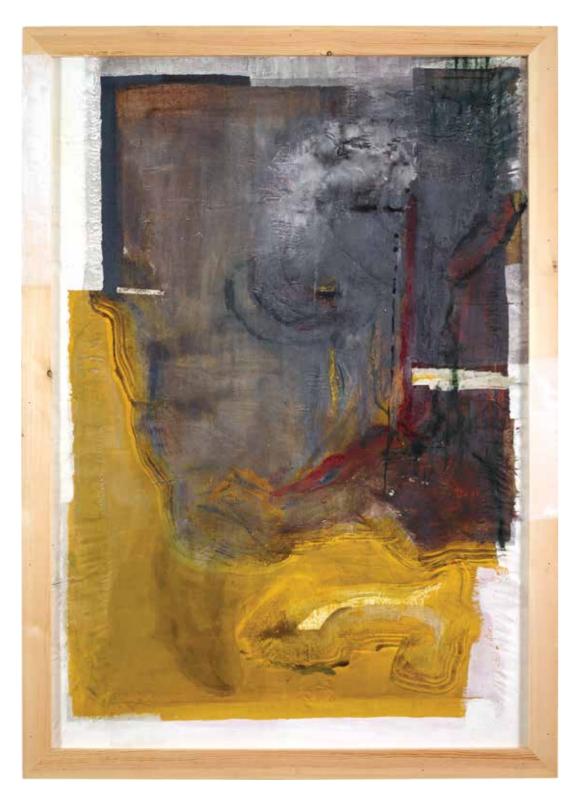




Mixed media on canvas | 178 x 114 cm | 2023



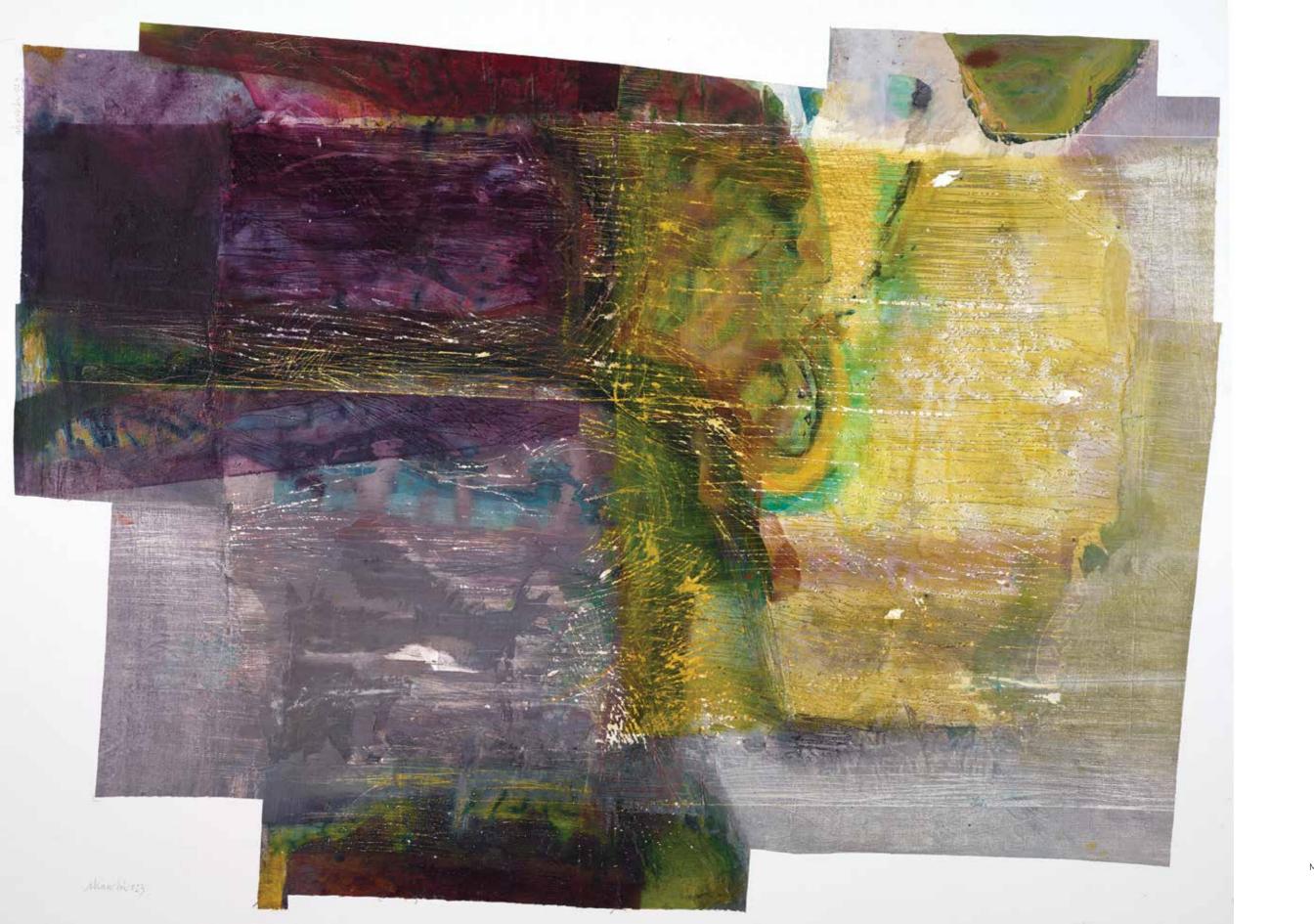
Mixed media on canvas | 171 x 138 cm | 2023





Mixed media on canvas | 168 x 115 cm | 2023 (RECTO) (VERSO)









Mixed media on canvas | 140 x 192 cm | 2023 (RECTO) (VERSO)



























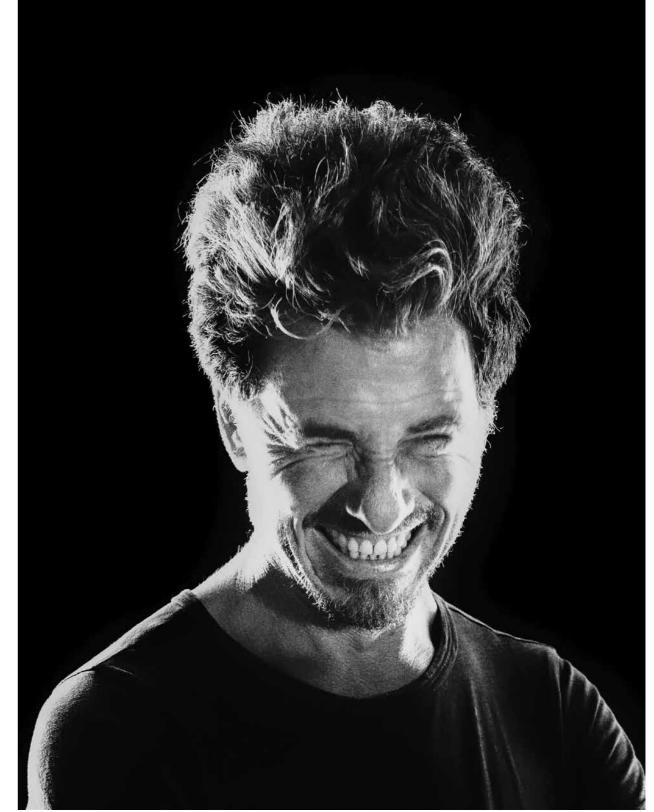


Mixed media on paper | 30 x 40 cm | 2023 (RECTO/VERSO)

## About the Artist

Shawki Youssef's paintings are about processes of thoughts and inquiries into what matters. Matter is physical substance, which is allegedly distinct from the mind, the spirit, and energy. Youssef's habitual and almost obsessive subject, the human body and the matter of factness of painting, as the former dissolves or vanishes into marks and traces within multifarious compositions. Delicate lines, shades, and transparencies of color interact with the white and textured surface of the canvas evoking the transience of matter's existence.

Shawki Youssef was born in Beirut in 1973. He received his bachelor's degree in Fine Arts from the Lebanese University in 1994 before going on to complete a Master's in science in 2007 at Saint Joseph University in Lebanon. Youssef's work extends across multiple mediums to include painting, drawing, video, and installations. Recent solo and group exhibitions include "Extimacy", Beirut Contemporary, Lisbon (2021); "Tracés 1994-2021", Agence 360, Paris (2021); "My Last Century Remains", Al Markhiya Gallery, Doha (2014); "Acid Fields", Green Art Gallery, Dubai (2013); "Le Corps Decouvert", the Institut Du Monde Arabe, Paris (2012); "Rebirth: Lebanon 21st Century Contemporary Art", Beirut Exhibition Center, Beirut (2011); "Hollow Flesh," Agial Art Gallery (2011); and "Fluid Being", Green Art Gallery (2011). His work can be found in the Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah, and in the Salsali Private Museum, Dubai. He lives and works in Beirut, Lebanon.



Shawki Youssef, 2019 from the series "Artists" by Gilbert Hage



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