

# FIGURE

A tilted, textured artwork, possibly a drawing or painting on a piece of paper, is layered over the large title text. The artwork features a sketch of a face with long, flowing hair on the left side. In the center, there is a small, light blue rectangular block. To the right of the block, there is a heart shape drawn with light blue and green lines. The background of the artwork is a mix of warm, earthy tones like brown, orange, and yellow, with some darker, more abstract lines and shapes. The overall style is expressive and somewhat abstract.

*conversation with* **GAL SCHINDLER**  
**JUNE 2023**

**N° 58**





***A thousand doors ago***, Oil on canvas and wood, 120 × 100 cm, 2021.  
Photographer: Corey Bartle-Sanderson.





***Clouds devour their prey***, Oil on canvas, 35 × 45 cm, 2022.  
Photographer: Corey Bartle-Sanderson.

**NOAM ALON** *in conversation with*  
**GAL SCHINDLER**

**NA**

What is your background, and how did you engage in the arts?

**GS**

I was born in Israel and went to an artistic school since first grade. I was surrounded by many paintings and sculptures when I grew up, which quickly triggered my interest in drawing and making things. Eventually, I took art more seriously while studying at the Slade for my BA, where I met great people and had lots of time to explore the kind of art I see myself engaging with.

**NA**

Your interest in the human body goes all the way back to the beginning of your artistic practice. Is there a specific feature or organ of the body that preoccupies you?

**GS**

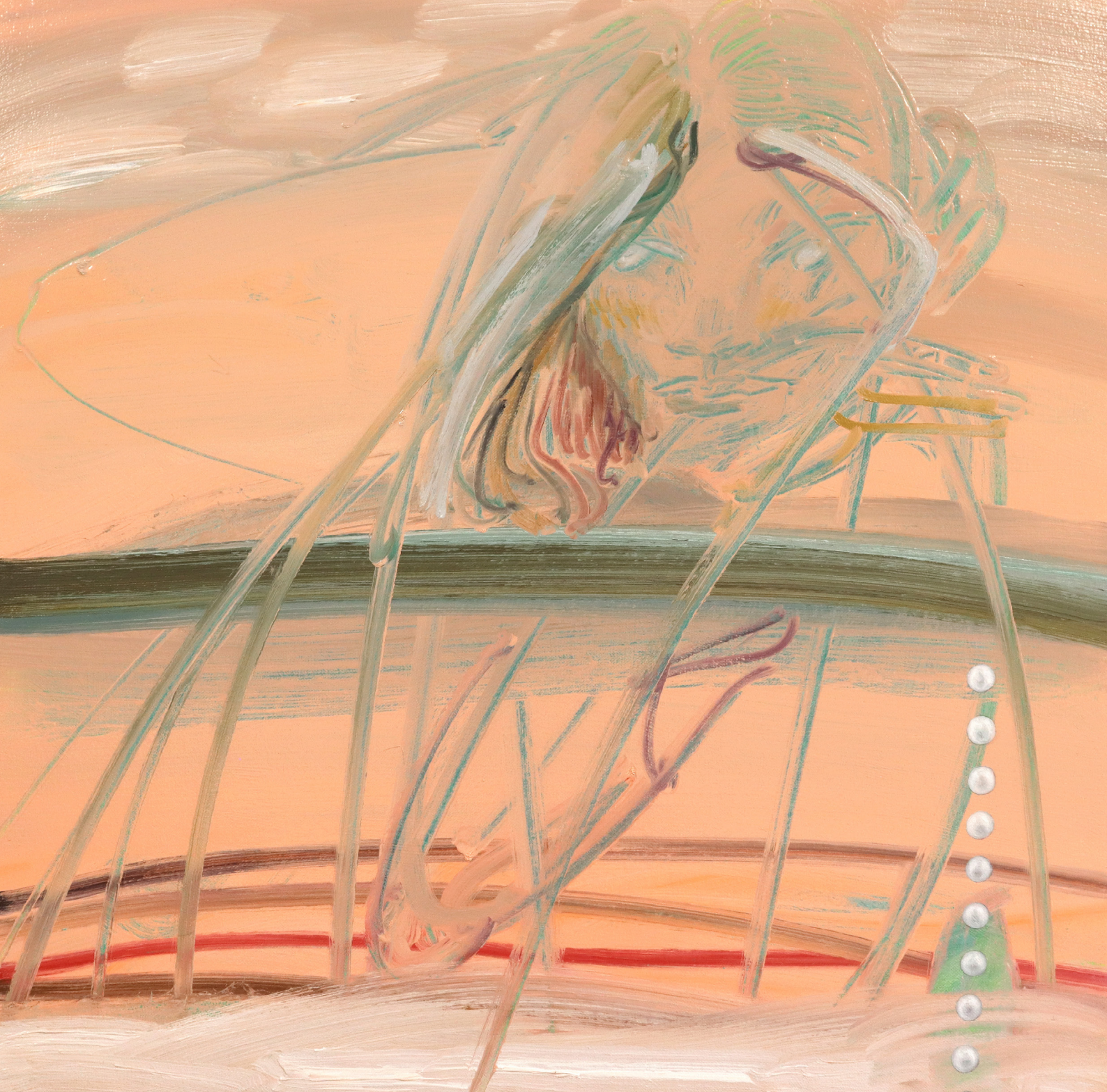
Very unexpected question. When I was younger, I was quite obsessed with drawing hands. And





*Floating Knives*, Oil on wood, 60 × 40 cm, 2021.





***Supergravity***, Oil on canvas, 61 × 61 cm, 2023.



also feet. It might be related to the fact that my father is an orthopaedic surgeon — all his anatomy books were around the house — and I remember these peculiar photos that he had in his office too, presenting human bodies being modified, re-sculptured, rearranged and twisted.

I was attracted to hands specifically because they are considered to be challenging to draw. It was difficult for me to draw hands but I kept on doing it. Since then, I detached myself from representational aesthetics. It was essential for me to let go of the ‘traditional’ body structure. Recently I found interest in it again, trying to find a way to combine some of its essence, but in a much more emancipated way.

The hand, though, remains important because it is what you paint with, this connection between reality, your eye and your ability to influence it. That is inescapable.

I also remember that since I was a kid, I was thinking of my hands as being ‘too big’ or ‘too old’ looking. When I would draw them, people would tell me *‘oh they look so masculine’*, or it was me who would see them that way. I wonder what this weird classification is. Where does it come from? Anyway, our hands can say a lot about us, perhaps more than any other body part — like in palmistry, by their shape, or how we carry and move them around.

**NA**

Speaking of your return to a more representational aesthetic, in your recent works you started adding realistic images of shells. Beside the connotation that one might have in mind to the feminine body or to the notion of vanitas in art history, I also thought about Gaston Bachelard who found inspiring specifically leftward-oriented-shells that *‘did not conform to rotations of its species’*. What does the form of the seashell represent for you?





***Clairvoyance***, Oil on canvas, 130 × 100 cm, 2022.





*The Fool*, Oil on canvas, 45 × 35 cm, 2022.



GS

First of all, I like the fact that they represent so many things. Whenever I think of one interpretation there is another one that appears. I find that a lot of people associate shells with the feminine world. It is true, in some ways, but they represent much more than that. There is so much more besides the body, the flesh or physicality, or even appearance in general. Beyond that, shells hold the tension of being inside yourself and beside yourself and the two poles of being an introvert or an extrovert, looking inwards and outwards. While observing them silently, we can see that more than representing the vanitas, a shell is actually a very hybrid object. Like a painting, though they are still and so to say 'dead', they encapsulate the memory of living. It's a vessel for a living creature. We kind of look at them and almost forget that it used to be a '*house*', a functioning living structure.

There is something 'whole' about them, their weird transition between being functional and being decorative. They are above all eternal, resistant. Silently resistant. This natural '*sculpture*' belongs to the realm of the ocean, which could be considered as an alternative world, almost like outer space. The ocean holds so many species we don't yet know of, so many unknown places that humans have never yet reached. In a way, it functions as a symbolic space for new definitions.

NA

Like Bachelard shells, the figure of the woman that you keep coming back to in your paintings is also not conforming with its own species. At least when we compare it to the feminine representation in Art History, depicted often as kind and soft. I wanted to ask you quite an odd question: if the women from your paintings had personality, how would you characterise it?





***November Air***, Oil on canvas, 107 × 82 cm, 2021.  
Photographer: Stephen James.



GS

Their personality would be necessarily rounded and not flat. Not only conforming, but at the same time not only resistant. I don't really think of these figures that much, they're almost like a projection. I cannot really escape from the fact that the feminine has been embedded in me, because I am a woman in this particular society.

The majority of the characters I paint are coming from my imagination, but it does always start from a place of looking at the body, usually of women, but often also of men. I look at a lot of pictures of beautiful bodies by photographers like George Platt Lynes or Herbert List, so in a way some of these characters are also women translated from the male gaze or the male form. To answer your question, the character of my figures would be a hybrid: monstrous, rebellious but also soft and gentle, completely serious yet entirely humorous too.

NA

I guess I won't be the first to tell you that there is something very enchanting in these feminine figures, that might also evoke witches. When witches were haunted in the middle age, they were brought to 'justice' and were forced to say that they '*did not dare to disobey the devil*'. Does it somehow resonate with the ambiance that you're trying to transmit in your paintings?

GS

I wouldn't say I'm uncomfortable but slightly uneasy with the word 'try'. I don't think I ever tried to transmit this or that... I am aware that there is a certain witchy energy to some of the figures and it is definitely somewhat deliberate. The revival of the witch as a good being, also, in my eyes, proposes a new, non-religious path to spirituality. I feel more comfortable with this term, or otherworldly and even magical.

NA

I saw recently that you were practicing ballet dancing. This physical research influence in a certain manner your artistic one? It seems that your feminine figures





***Eternal window***, Oil on canvas, 46 × 36 cm, 2021.  
Photographer: Corey Bartle-Sanderson.



are somehow in movement, or at least that there's a lot of importance to your physical gesture behind and on the canvas. Would you say your action of painting mimics dancing movements?

**GS**

Yes! There is definitely a connection to my body when I paint. It is a process of excitement and sort of a trance or maybe even transcendence, connecting the body with what is in front of it, through the creation of a gesture. I often think about the way we are limited by the size of our bodies and the way it moves.

You are right when you say that there is some movement of the figures themselves. I recently got back to dancing, which is something I used to do very intensely when I was a little girl. It is precious to try and reconnect to our younger recollections and memories and even senses. Something about the classic ballet ritual, including the clothing and the punctual, repetitive movements, the piano and the sharp rhythms, is so charged. There is also something important for me about learning to master my connection with the body, the better you can do it, the better it allows you to forget the body... forget it in a deep way.

**NA**

In your piece *Eternal Window* (2021), one can see a prickly pear. I guess that some of our readers don't know that this cactus-fruit is actually deeply rooted in Israeli culture, referring at the same time to the first generation of Israelis who were born on Israeli land after 1930, and the actual colonial appropriation, both physically and symbolically, of these cactus plants, who were cultivated by the palestinians. Is there for you a political message behind the use of the prickly pear? And if not, what else can you say about your position as an Israeli artist active abroad?

**GS**

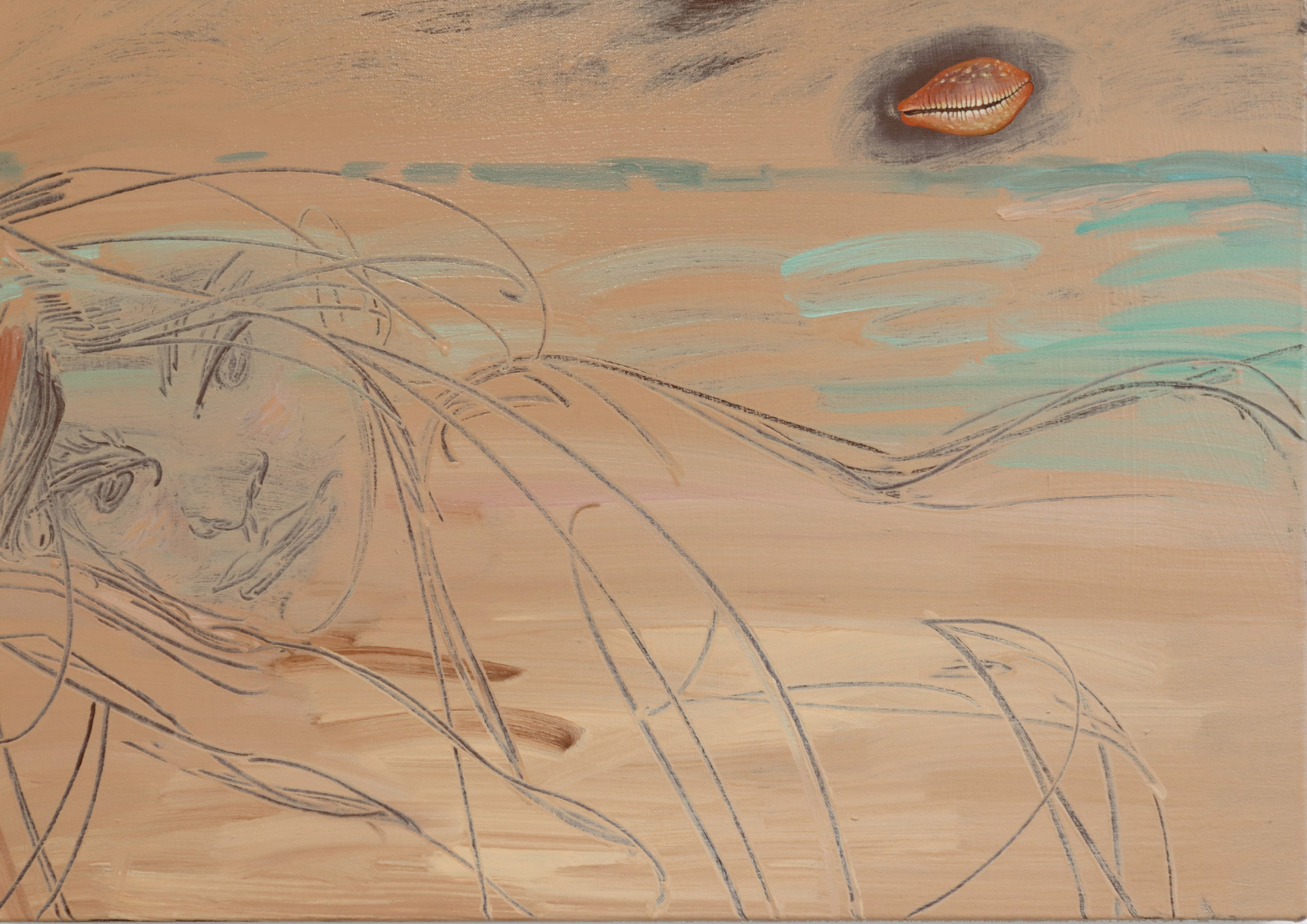
I am sure many people do not know what *Sabra* [informal-turned-formal modern Hebrew term





***Desert Frost***, Oil on Canvas, 46 × 36 cm, 2022.  
Photographer: Gregory Copitet.







that defines any Jew born in Israel] means to Israeli culture. I don't necessarily have one clear opinion about my position, but what I really do love about painting is that it makes space for anyone to think independently about political issues, through nature and through a human point of view and not through a national view point.

It does influence me being an Israeli artist living abroad, but I often think more generally about all the people coming from non-western countries living in a place like the UK. What does it mean to not be local? To be uprooted? On one hand, it is exciting as the discourse in the UK is more progressive, for example on gender equality and awareness. Moving to a big western city and trying to be part of it is almost not a choice... Sometimes there is no choice but to live elsewhere. I think of that a lot and I am sure it infiltrates what I do.

I wish that the Israeli government could allow a dialogue that is not based on violence or hatred, that will just breed more of it.

**NA**

Why did you choose London above other artistic scenes in the world?

**GS**

Many reasons... I used to look at the works of Lucien Freud all the time, so the fact that he was teaching there meant a lot to me. I thought London was the right place for me to be, not too far away from my home and family, and where there is such a rich history of painting. And beautiful gardens of course! I liked the green parks of the city and it seemed to have a lot of respect for the arts. It's not to be taken for granted.

**NA**

Often your feminine figures have very long hair. Though it is often associated with great power — I think of Samson from the bible or of the german legend about





***Razor Wave***, Oil on wood, 60 × 40 cm, 2021.  
Photographer: Stephen James.





*Spin*, Oil on canvas, 55 × 40 cm, 2023.



Rapunzel that used her hair to save herself — in certain Asian cultures, walking around with unkempt long hair means to be irresponsible. Where do you position yourself, or your figures, between these two poles?

**GS**

The more hair, the better! Hair can be a force, more a good one than an evil one. In your examples you left out Magdalene and her hair that was used for covering her body. The hair functions as a covering is also an interesting aspect in relation to covering in painting as well as to unlearning and simplifying. When things are covered, when there is an empty space in a picture, the tension coming from curiosity can sometimes lead to clarity — although contradicting. Sometimes when there is too much incoming information, there's an urge to remove or filter to make room for the unknown and the unseen. By the way, it is worth mentioning that, etymologically, Samson represents the sun (= *Shemesh*) and Delilah represents the night (= *Laila*).

**NA**

I found that when the hair participates in your minimal representation of the body, it brings a new important layer, that adds a lot of dynamic, something 'sauvage' that emphasises the way you are treating the form of the body.

**GS**

Of course I see what you mean, but I don't really think about it while I paint. It is funny to me sometimes how people react to my paintings while saying—'*oh, they have long hair, so they are women of course*'. Well, they are women but not all of them have long hair. And long hair could also be very masculine...

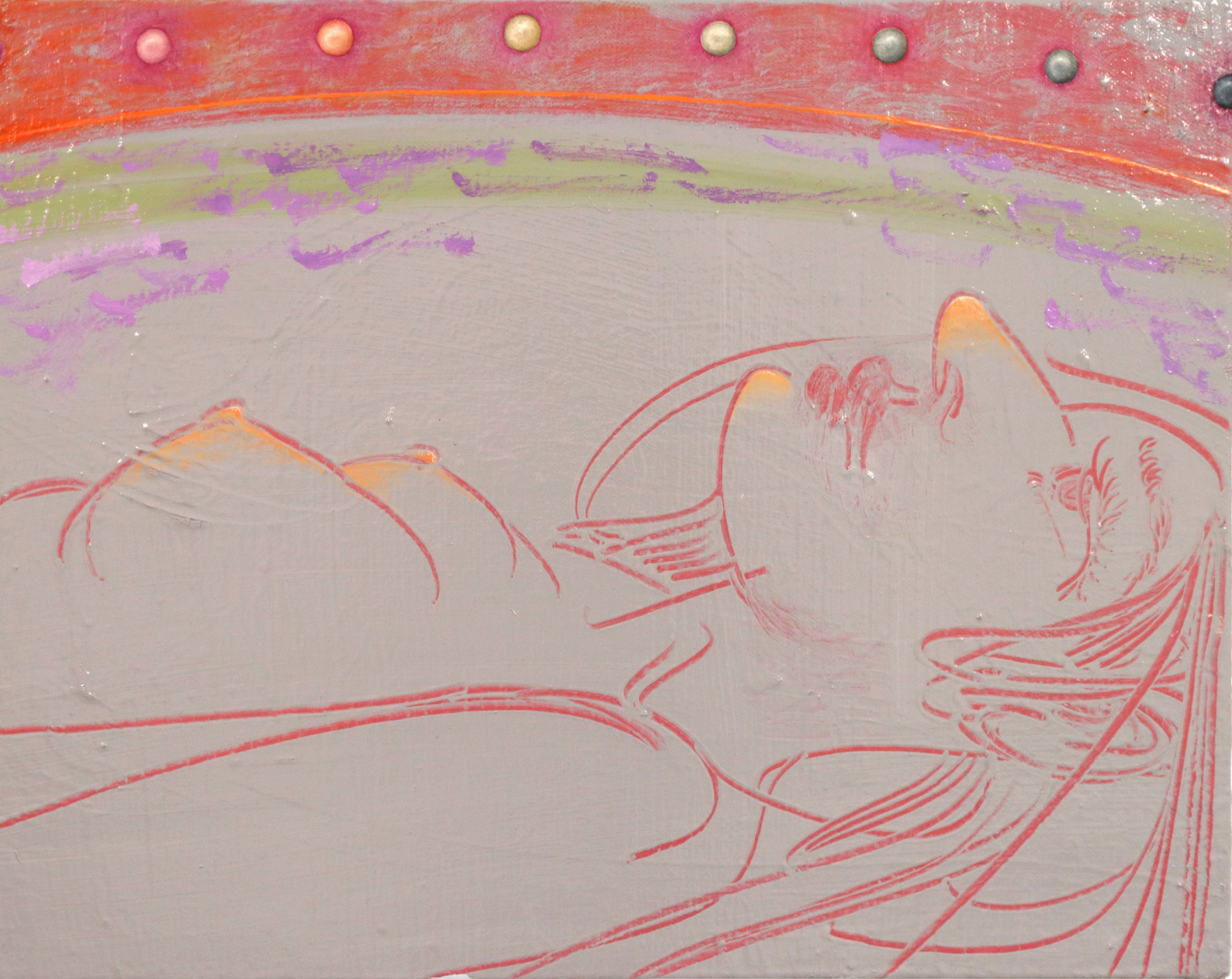
**NA**

What about your practice of drawing? You described it in your last interview as an '*intimate portal to freedom*'. Did you ever think of showing them? What else can you tell me about this secret practice that you have?

**GS**

I am actually working on a book showing a collection of drawings that will be published soon.







I love showing my drawings but I do enjoy keeping it as a space where I can be less committed, in a way. In my studio I am working on paintings. Intentionally I don't have a table there so I would be able to move around freely. I know that if I have a table I'll start drawing and reading and look at things and get distracted... Drawing is something that I do at home, in a more intimate space... It is not necessarily that they are separate, they feed one another, the drawing and the painting.

I never want to translate a drawing into a painting but I need to do both to see how they respond to one another. There's more room to manoeuvre with drawing, for example going more easily into details. Although I find that they are two separate mediums, I try to keep in my paintings the simplicity of a line that I have in drawing. Although, a line in painting would never be a line, if we think about it from a materialistic point of view.

**NA**

Going back to very mundane aspects of your practice, how does a day in your studio look? You just mentioned some of it. How do you start working on a new painting and how do you know when it's done?

**GS**

It is usually more of a gut feeling when it is done. I do not really set myself rules for when it is done or not. Therefore, my day in the studio is always very unexpected. I would never know how long it will take, since I need a long time to look at the painting before I finish it or even before I start different stages of it... As I said I never really plan, so I can start with something and then erase it and then make it again and then erase it and make it again and so on and so on.

**NA**

Do you devote yourself to one painting at a time or developing several pieces at the same time? How do you navigate between them?





***Sky Train***, Oil on canvas, 35 × 45 cm, 2022.





***Mouthful***, Oil on canvas, 100 × 100 cm, 2021.  
Photographer: Stephen James.



**GS**

Overall I do like focusing on one thing at a time because I'm distracted really easily. Specifically for the show I recently had in New York, I started adding new elements long after the painting was 'ready'. While preparing a show however, I do like to have the works in front of me all together so I definitely work on several pieces at the same time. With different variations, different timings.

**NA**

I read that you get inspiration often from poetry. I wanted to know how this form of literature enriches your work: in what way you are being inspired by poets, or even using their writings?

**GS**

Actually the piece you've mentioned before, *Eternal Window* (2021), is the title of a poem by the Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai. The inspiration I get from poetry stems from my fascination with languages. Painting is a language. But I am also fascinated by the way words unfold with so many different meanings and how quickly they create a mental image/representation or something that throws you into a different place. I always like it when words leaves me puzzled. I'm moved by the creativity in poetry. There is something about a combination of words that don't make sense that attracts me.

**NA**

When you said 'mental image', I thought about the link between this term and your choice of colour. Can you tell me a bit more about this link?

**GS**

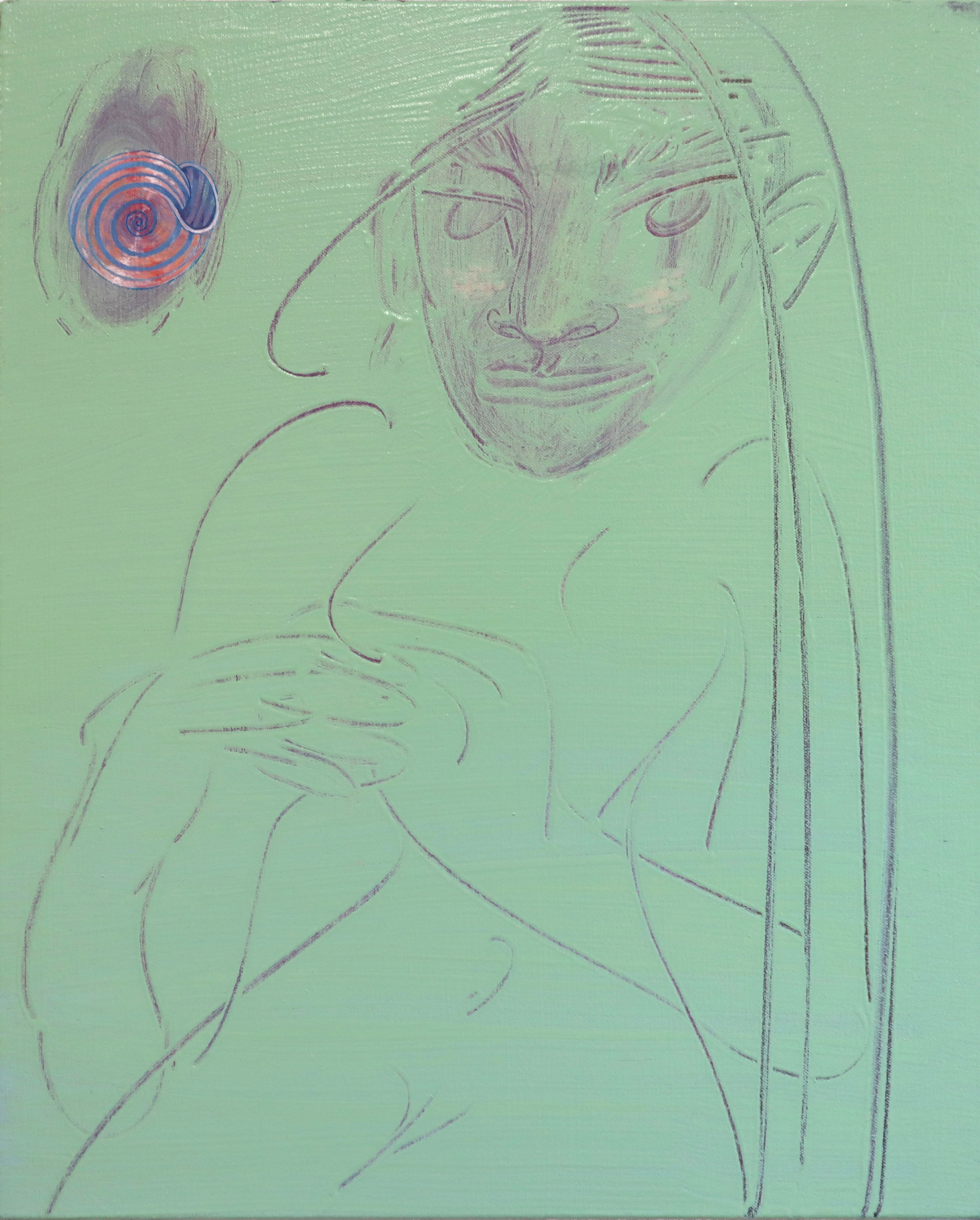
Colours are mysterious. They really do invoke different emotions that I never really know to predict. Yellow is a colour of hope, or happiness, like the light of the sun. Albers considered yellow as the colour of healing. But at the same time, in the world of symbols, yellow functions more as a warning colour, showing in hazardous signs for example, or even on poisonous animals! In my work I almost struggle with colours in a fun way, I play with them. They play with me.





*May Fever*, Oil on canvas, 45 × 35 cm, 2021.





**Hunter**, Oil on canvas, 50 × 40 cm, 2022.



Gal Schindler, Figure Figure 2023  
Courtesy of the artist

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