

An abstract painting by David Heathcote, featuring a vibrant blue background with various textures and colors. The left side is dominated by dark, almost black, vertical strokes with some lighter blue and yellow highlights. The center and right side are filled with lighter blue, white, and green brushstrokes, interspersed with patches of red and orange. The overall effect is a complex, layered composition with a strong sense of movement and depth.

DAVID HEATHCOTE

Numberless Islands

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Cover image: **Night Thoughts** *(detail)*, 2009, oil on canvas, 46 x 61 cm

I would that we were, my beloved, white birds on the foam of the sea!
We tire of the flame of the meteor, before it can fade and flee;
And the flame of the blue star of twilight, hung low on the rim of the sky,
Has awaked in our hearts, my beloved, a sadness that may not die.

A weariness comes from those dreamers, dew-dabbled, the lily and rose;
Ah, dream not of them, my beloved, the flame of the meteor that goes,
Or the flame of the blue star that lingers hung low in the fall of the dew:
For I would we were changed to white birds on the wandering foam: I and you!

I am haunted by numberless islands, and many a Danaan shore,
Where Time would surely forget us, and Sorrow come near us no more;
Soon far from the rose and the lily, and fret of the flames would we be,
Were we only white birds, my beloved, buoyed out on the foam of the sea!

WB Yeats, *The White Birds*, 1892.

The title of this exhibition, **Numberless Islands**, came to David Heathcote when he heard in his mind the final stanza of Yeats's poem, repeated over and over again like a haunting tune or insistent meditation.

Yeats's ode to his muse Maude Gonne, penned following his first unsuccessful proposal to her (of four), fantasises about transcending the socio-political circumstances in Ireland that denied him her hand (an Irish revolutionary, Gonne could not reconcile Yeats's refusal to convert to Catholicism and his less radical allegiance to the Nationalist cause). The Danaan shore, or Tier-nan-Oge, of Irish folklore, is an imaginary land of everlasting youth and joy, and thus a metaphor for eternal and unconditional love, unbound by circumstance. The allusive seagulls "buoyed out on the foam of the sea" personify a freedom from the march of time, from frontiers and human sorrow. Yeats's words thus evoke imaginative escapism, freedom from constraints and timelessness. And, indeed, it is these three conditions that have preoccupied David Heathcote's art through the course of his career.

The poem's last lines resonated in the artist's thoughts as both inspiration for his own mental journeys and descriptors of his career-long project – that is, to work through his inner vision according to his own rules. Numberless islands are, to Heathcote, possibilities for exploration; each one a "conclusion to a journey". Collectively, they embody a confluence of thoughts – poetical imaginings, feelings and emotions, and remembered experiences. They are innumerable flights of fancy, and seemingly intangible visions, apprehended, somehow, in oil paint.

Heathcote's journeys may start with a cognitive trigger, sometimes taking him back to his past, or projecting him into uncharted places. The poetry of Wordsworth, Yeats and Heaney (among others) may, for example, stir up recollections of childhood or richly historical or mythological lands. While, for example, his early series of drawings, *Deliberate Holiday*

(1958), borrows from Wordsworth's childhood musings in order to see his own past through another's lens, he has imagined Istanbul through Yeats's *Sailing to Byzantium* (1928), conceiving several works of that title. His approach to Istanbul was thus as a 'stay at home tourist', happier to contemplate the subject with his mind's eye than to experience it directly: "I was obsessed with this line, as one becomes obsessed with a piece of music. I drew Byzantium and thought I should see Istanbul, and then I saw a documentary of the interior of the Hagia Sophia and I thought 'don't go there; it's too crowded; stay away!'"¹ For Heathcote, the visualisation of memories and poems displaces his impressions of the prosaic corporeal world, as he forsakes the concrete and absolute in favour of distortion. Just as poetic verses are perceived subjectively, memories are rarely accurate reflections of what one sees and experiences; inevitably they are both facets of the imagination that satisfy the artist's need to abstract and transform.

Thoughts of the past, often involuntarily appearing in the mind, are more intriguing to Heathcote than documenting what he physically sees in front of him, in the 'here and now'. One's past experiences are uniquely rationalised and ordered in ways that seem mysterious and inconsistent. As he explains, "my relationship with the past is something of a dream world...there are things that come through in my paintings that I can't really explain. And I have a feeling that they have come from the past, and in some cases the distant past."² To Heathcote, this uncertainty and fallibility is a strength, a forceful and compelling condition that situates emotion at the centre of the creative process. An important criterion for his work is to stir "something human and real" though "not necessarily in a pleasant or romantic way"; only, to let the mind's preoccupations and whims come through to the canvas.³ "The poetic" is for him an essential agency that conveys the unreliability of memory and persistence of emotion, alerting us to consider what is foregrounded or imagined in his imagery, and why.

Thus, titles are given to works upon their completion, and rarely before. They mark the point at which the artist attempts to pin-down his subjects for the first time – at the end of a conceptual journey. By this stage the painting will have undergone numerous developments, the composition conceived, redacted and fleshed out by Heathcote as, over time, he responds to changing feelings and ideas. Certain figures, motifs, shapes or gestures might present themselves as defining elements of the work – as is the case for *Burning Tree*, *Yellow Moon* and *Black Arrow*. And while some of these features may be prominent within the composition, others will appear as elliptical flourishes in the background (the black arrow may be missed with the blink of an eye). Therefore the purported substance of a painting may in fact hinge on its recessive details – Heathcote's recognition that subconscious thought may bias or redirect the mind's journey.

So too are places and cultures suggested in titles. But these are almost exclusively generic descriptions, either of landscape features or of human actions – for example, *Botanical Garden*, *Mysterious Delta*, and *Hunting in Winter*. Thus, such works refuse to be situated in one place and time. Instead, they embody several seen and imagined environments. *Remembered Journeys* (2000) is a metaphor for this endeavour, a 'manifesto' for Heathcote's metaphysical approach to landscape painting. This small oil on board is almost diagrammatic in essence: joined-up shapes of yellows, oranges and pinks are intersected with deep blue, suggesting unspecified islands and sea, while thin dark lines, continuously drawn, evoke the course of a journey.

While Heathcote's paintings cannot be described as 'nostalgic', a time lag, and desire to recover something lost, is essential to his treatment of 'home'. Describing himself as a “retrospective kind of painter”, his life in Zimbabwe (then Southern Rhodesia) and northern Nigeria simulated imaginings of England when in Africa, and Africa when in England

(imperialist references aside, Kipling's oft-quoted line “And what should they know of England who only England know?” seems a fitting adage for the need to consider a country from afar in order to appreciate it).⁴

Mysterious Garden (1968) was painted soon after Heathcote arrived in Nigeria, at a time marked by solitude, productivity, and the dry and dusty Harmattan season. It is one of several “very English” works, he made in quick succession.⁵ The sight of a donkey's hooves raising a cloud of fine Saharan sand sent his thoughts back to the verdant English gardens of his youth. He imagined them as if standing atop a cliff and surveying an ocean of lush vegetation. Speaking of his return from Africa in 1979, Heathcote described his re-engagement with the Kentish countryside: “I felt I needed to go out and 'eat the landscape' somehow”⁶

Yet, in the following years visions of African culture haunted his practice. *Hunting in Winter* (1984) and *Hunters in the Snow* (1985) developed from inter-continental imaginings. “I was inspired by a walk in the country. It was winter and there had been heavy snow. I was walking alone, in silence, no-one else about. Trudging up a long open slope, with the snow glistening almost blindingly in the sun, I suddenly had the sensation that I was in a group of hunters, carrying primitive weapons and bent on killing”.⁷ Heathcote's walk put him in mind of Bruegel's *The Hunters in the Snow* (1565), as his own title clearly confirms. It afforded a *sense* of the subject-matter he might paint. However, the distorted faces and figures that emerged on canvas owed more to the raw aggression of African sculpture and masks, while the strong contrasting colours of *Hunting in Winter* – black, red, yellow and green – recalled the continent's intense light and vibrant textiles. Heathcote employed these bold hues partly out of frustration, admitting that in the short winter days in England he longed “to MAKE light!”.⁸

An earlier painting, *Gods of War* (1983), is arguably Heathcote's most ambitious and aggressive African vision, handled on a grand scale. Combative heads bear their teeth, baying and scowling amid a confusing scrum of colours. One, seemingly more still than the rest, painted flat against the picture plane, challenges us with a full-on stare. The face to its right, its eyes and nose violently scored-out with the paintbrush, is an eerie disembodied presence. Tilting up from a thin, horizontal black frame, it is almost mechanical in attitude, like a rusting metal deity come to life. Inscribed below, as the final gesture, the words 'IRON MAN' announce the subject; it occurred to Heathcote that he was in fact painting the Fon god of war and ironwork, the *Gu*, and haunting his imagination was a fearsome machete-wielding iron god sculpture from the Republic of Benin.

But grimacing heads (also see, for example, the etching *Grimacings*, 1983) hardly seem to recall the decorative art of northern Nigeria, Heathcote's 'African home'. Though the intense colours may obliquely influence his work, the patterned designs of the Hausa people have not exerted a direct influence on his paintings, not even retrospectively. Rather, they have been too close to his thoughts, as the focus of prolonged scholarship and collecting (inspired by his "sense of duty to make some records of the local art which would end up disappearing").⁹ Thus *Gods of War* comes from a more general sense of Africa – part memory, part fantasy, and part art history.

For several years (1969-1978) Heathcote's doctoral studies on the Hausa arrested all progress in his painting, as he concentrated exclusively on his career as an art historian. He recalls, "My mindset as an art historian required a different emotional involvement. I had to be very precise".¹⁰ But for Heathcote, painting is anything but a 'precise' act, and he found his research left him unable – indeed unwilling – to reconcile intimate knowledge with imaginative expression. He only returned to painting once his studies were complete. Indeed, Heathcote's insights into

Hausa crafts dispelled any illusion that they were romantic endeavours, or that they might become a source of inspiration for his painting. "I have found no evidence of any elaborate symbolism in Hausa art", he concluded in his book.¹¹ Notwithstanding the skill of its making, the essentially decorative and commodified status of Hausa art seemed to belie its spiritual or 'poetic' integrity. Speaking of embroidery patterns, Heathcote felt no aura of uniqueness about them that might suggest a personal or regional symbolism; rather, he found them almost unchanged since the sixteenth century and repeated by craftsmen across the 350 miles of Hausaland he studied. Moreover, the embroiderers he met seemed unable to think of their works qualitatively, suggesting, perhaps, an emotional disconnect with their creations: "I found the best of the embroiderers, Alhaji Sanni of Kano, who was also a draughtsman on paper. I said to him 'Which of these drawings do you prefer?', as I wanted to know whether he had some method of judging whether one was better than the next. And this was asked through an interpreter. Sanni didn't understand, so I tried to put it another way, but we couldn't get anywhere with the question, 'Which one do you like?'. He looked at me very puzzled, and in the end said 'It is not for me to decide which one I prefer but for the client to decide.'"¹² To this day, then, the art of the Hausa remains too tangible to Heathcote; not 'poetic' or elusive enough to stir the painter's imagination.

Heathcote's strong dependence on imagination and memory brings with it the problem of encountering 'the real', a condition that is best summed up by Marcel Proust in the novel *In Search of Lost Time*:

So often, in the course of my life, reality had disappointed me because at the instant when my senses perceived it my imagination, which was the only organ that I possessed for the engagement of beauty, could not apply itself to it, in virtue of that ineluctable law which ordains that we can only imagine what is absent.¹³

Indeed, Heathcote is most comfortable with impermanence and absence, and enjoys the challenge this brings to his practice. Mental visions of his subjects, out of physical reach, never seem to disappoint him, even if they spark an agonising struggle.

And “painting *is* a struggle”, he admits. “There are paintings which I know are in effect twelve different paintings, one on top of another, and I still haven't arrived. It's terribly frustrating”.¹⁴ To arrive at a satisfactory conclusion, the process should not be too easy, Heathcote feels. In recent years he has abandoned sculpture on the basis that the 'plastic arts' seem to manifest themselves too straightforwardly in his practice. In painting, however, he would rather grapple with the problems of compositional structure and colour, knowing that he may meditate on his actions again and again, with the potential for endless revisions and effacements. “You may start off working hard in one direction, then you switch the tone and colour and it suddenly becomes more intense...You realise you want to do something and you do it, but the whole thing hangs in the balance, as on a tightrope. Of course, you may stand back and see straight away that you've painted out too much!”.¹⁵ This precarious creative journey feeds a compulsive desire to follow a thread of emotions and thoughts, before settling on forms that feel the most resonant. Comparing this practice with the very different matter of transcribing a subject from life, Heathcote acknowledges the necessity of his struggle: “I have to find my own way in what I am doing. I don't know what the end product is going to be. One thing about Slade School teaching then [1955-7] was that you ended up with pretty much what you started out with: there's the life model or still life, and you end up with an image of that. By comparison, what is excruciatingly difficult for me in my way of working – and I don't choose it because it's easier, because it absolutely isn't. It just seems my *only* way – is the idea that I may arrive at something which is really *me*”.¹⁶ The choices settled on by the artist are necessarily dynamic, fantastic or moving: poetic distortions of the prosaic world, importantly 'edited' by the mind and hand.

Take, for example, *Burning Tree*. This vivid landscape exemplifies Heathcote's juxtaposition of real and imagined visions, worked through several re-paintings. Incongruous to its tranquil setting of lush green flora and clear blue sky, the tree stands out as an uncanny, dreamlike element, inexplicably enveloped in raging flames. It seems almost biblical in its symbolism. Here, in fact, the artist has opted for a scene from his youth, much exaggerating the romance of the view. His walks home as a teenager, that led him through Kentish fields, would sometimes be solitary moments of reflection. When one dark night he encountered a burning tree stump, alone, this fierce and poetic image became for him something deeply personal and moving. As the single witness to this *force majeure*, a lightning storm, he claimed it as his own vision – something which has, in time, accrued new associations in his mind, and now finds itself manifested, finally, on canvas. It is a vision of home that only the passing of time affords, something more fantastic than the actual lived experience of the event.

Heathcote's painting has always depended on the abstraction of ideas. Thus, from the outset of his training at the Slade School of Art (1955-7) he felt deeply uncomfortable with “objective painting”. Going against the grain of the curriculum, which centred on traditional life-class teaching and the realism of William Coldstream, he chose to distance himself from the contingencies of mimesis: “The old Euston Road School were there – I was reacting against that ...From drawing through to painting, Coldstream's work seemed not to develop along the way in any imaginative sense. The paintings were simply his drawings with paint, and every brushstroke measured”.¹⁷ To Heathcote, exacting measurements seemed completely at odds with the expressive aim of painting: “My tutor would come round and say 'can you see that shadow over there is blue-ish, and the one over there is pink-ish' and I didn't have the slightest bit of interest; they just looked GREY”.¹⁸ While he naturally felt obliged to persevere with this dominant mode, to hone the skills deemed essential for his portfolio, he felt a strong need to find a more expressive path of his

own: "At the Slade I felt that I really wanted my eventual development to take place through imaginative compositions. But at the same time I still had this nagging feeling that I had to be a good draughtsman to be a good artist".¹⁹ Thus in his frustration the young Heathcote turned to his art historical influences, which included the works of Cezanne and Picasso, and so began experimenting with Cubism, adopting it as a vehicle for understanding objects through 'fresh eyes' and ordering them with a greater degree of imagination: "now I could organise a picture myself, make a painting that was truly my own".²⁰

Though it was short-lived, this experiment, which yielded a number of etchings made in the life class, was clearly an important formative influence. Carrying over to his mature work, the flat picture plane, in both figurative and landscape works, has become a vital tool for disembodiment of his subjects and thus exploring a more inward vision. Shallow spatial arrangements are, for example, most marked in *Yellow Moon* and *Spatial Poem* (1994), while a sense of fragmentation persists in the paintings *Mysterious Garden*, *Hunting in Winter* and *Botanical Garden*.



Cubist Head, 1956,
etching and aquatint, 15 x 15 cm

Drawings

Over the years Heathcote has treated life drawing more as a way of understanding form than as a template for his painted subjects. Indeed, none of his direct observations have found their way into his compositions as reworked designs on canvas; rather, they have served as a means to an end for developing his handling of form and his awareness of the physical world, should he wish to employ the figure expressively in paintings, albeit in a much abstracted sense. While today he has abandoned life drawing altogether, instead relying on his matured knowledge and retentive memory, he admits that he intermittently persisted with it out of conscience: "for a while I hadn't quite managed to throw that sense of duty and guilt away, but now I feel I have".²¹ Such an engagement was, furthermore, sustained for several years when Heathcote served as a Fine Art lecturer in Canterbury, teaching life drawing as part of the prescribed curriculum; it was thus a necessary part of his routine as a jobbing artist-academic.



Self Portrait, 1961,
graphite on paper, 23 x 16 cm

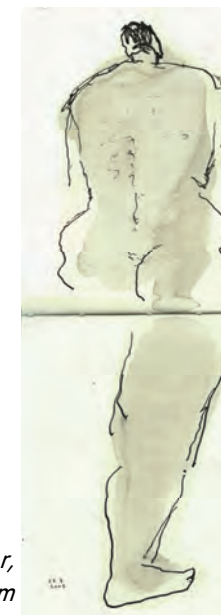


Self Portrait with Hat, 1961,
graphite on paper, 23 x 16 cm

Though Heathcote is an impressive draughtsman, and deftly handles the human form, he rarely responds positively to seeing his old life drawings, often dismissing them as “uninteresting”, or threatening to consign them to the bin. Indeed, he has discarded many over the years, including most of his early output, on the basis that they seem a moot, self-serving subject. But in his studio there remain a fair few remnants, scattered among folios. Two of these are self-portraits, from 1961: early works that were perhaps spared only on account of their personal subject-matter. These are severe images. Heathcote's acute stare reflects his state of duress: “I was in Italy for a short scholarship and I was in touch with a family about Christmas. They had gone away and I hadn't received a vital letter. So I found myself alone in Milan, in a hotel room with a bottle of wine and a sandwich, and this had to get me through Christmas. It was too cold outside, in the snow, to venture out, and so I looked at myself in the mirror and did these intense drawings”.²² These drawings were made at a transitional time in Heathcote's career, a period of flux following art school when he continued to weigh up his language as a painter, while working from life and the imagination. On this particular sojourn he had also made several imaginative drawings, inspired by his time in Rome; auto-biographical ‘vignettes’ of his encounters with antique sculptures. But only later would he find a more expressive approach to the figure through experimenting with distortion. Just as Cubism had previously helped him to achieve this, several years later he turned to a more free-hand, gestural manner, working rapidly in charcoal, thick graphite, brushed ink, and pen, to cast off the tentativeness that defined his earlier practice. *Short Poses* (2005) and *Back View* (2007) are economically handled sketches, areas of which are conceived with a continuous movement of line – a far cry from the laboured pencil shading of the self-portraits. With its tiny head and disproportionately large leg, the second of the two exemplifies the sometimes extreme distortion employed in Heathcote's figure studies as a way of thinking about their expressive potential.



Short Poses, 2005, ink and crayon on paper, 16 x 21 cm



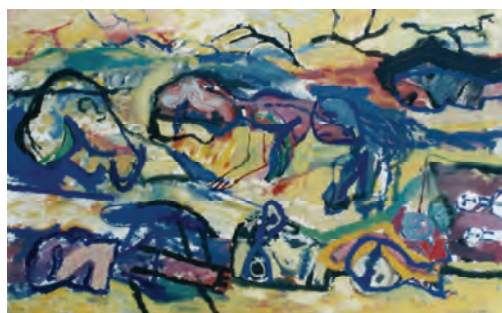
Back View, 2007, ink and wash on paper, 30 x 11 cm

Within this archive, two curious ink and brush drawings, *Horseman and Beggar* and *Leaning Horseman* (both 1988), however stand out as belonging to quite a distinct project. These are clearly not life room drawings, and neither do they seem to be drawn from nature. The figures are treated too obliquely to be a direct scrutiny of form, while the painterly medium affords them a poetic aura, offering up bold, intractable gestures. Moreover, equestrian subjects have not found their way into Heathcote's paintings. These are, in fact, imagined visions. Thus in their purpose and manufacture they may be considered as neither studies (they exist as imagined, realised artworks, rather than transcribed or designed memoranda), nor paintings (they are instantaneously drawn on paper, precluding the possibility of continuous revision), but drawings which are meaningful in their rapid execution and choice of media. It may be assumed that the purpose of such works is to satisfy a simple compulsion to inscribe; thus to gratify instantly an expressive need in the artist.

Still, this insistence on working up the image with free and immediate gestures is not altogether at odds with Heathcote's practice in painting. While some of his paintings are indeed "struggles" that require a prolonged journey of thought, with many revisions along the way, his physical act of applying paint to canvas (or board) is necessarily swift: "I have to put the paint down very quickly ...If I am lucky I will repaint the whole thing very quickly".²³ It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that the drawings' loose, inky markings bear an affinity with those in Heathcote's earlier paintings *Sahel* (1985) and *Gods of War*, (1983) in which black paint freely delineates the figures.



Horseman and Beggar, 1988,
ink on paper, 20 x 15 cm



Sahel, 1985,
oil on canvas, 76 x 122 cm

The immediacy with which marks are made in Heathcote's paintings and imaginative drawings thus leads one to consider the influence of time upon the resulting composition. While his figurative paintings and life drawings seem poles apart stylistically (see, for example, *TCR*, 1982, and *Short Poses*, 2005), this is naturally to do with the imaginative intervention that takes place in the course of developing his subject. However, so too may it relate to differences in practice: the more moderate pace of sitting to draw and observe the model; and the standing action of intensely applying viscose paint to the canvas. But how might we settle such a question?

Examining another area of the drawing archive may in fact shed some light on the subject. Since his return from Africa 35 years ago, Heathcote has made observational drawings of the Kentish countryside. As with the life drawings, these works have not, at any stage, been intended as preparatory material for the artist's landscape or abstract paintings. Rather, they were made to inform Heathcote's sense of place, and to develop in his mind memories of home. They are, typically, a means by which he initially encounters views and forms his impressions, for example taking in the sum of certain walks. Thus, he draws in order to think and look: "I choose a view and don't use it for my finished paintings. But it's a way of stopping and looking as one might stop and see flowers, and the colour and structure".²⁴ Then, he 'forgets' these drawings. While, of course, Heathcote's memory may return again to the experience of making them, or to views with which he is familiar, he will not consult his sketches while painting, for they have already served their informative purpose. It is therefore something of a revelation to survey a range of landscape sketches Heathcote has made over many years, and these are especially interesting in what they reveal about his stylistic choices.

Heathcote's first studies of Kent were ignited after twenty years of living in Africa. Soon after his return home, he felt a great need to re-familiarise

himself with his childhood environs, and so over the following years charted a great many villages in the east of the county. Significantly, this was achieved by bicycle, "I made those sketches very quickly because I was moving from place to place, cycling", and by quickly glancing back on views during walks.²⁵ The speed with which he executed these drawings thus influenced their economical handling: simple horizon lines to adumbrate schematic panoramic views; trees drawn with just three perfunctory marks; scribbled areas to suggest a sense of the flora. These spare sketches stand in stark contrast to the meticulous ink drawings made in recent years which, with their tiny 'pointillist' dots, have been plotted by the artist when sitting down and thus prolonging his encounter. So too are there differences again in *Open Ground* and *Dutch Landscape* (both 1989), which are speedily drawn though over a sustained time, with considerably greater detail, layering and atmosphere than some of their counterparts (they have been reworked with a putty rubber). Significantly, however, that first group of loose drawings bears a very clear affinity with the structures of Heathcote's paintings. Compare, for example, the horizontal planes of *Tower* (1989) and *Spatial Poem* (1994); the jagged vertical lines of *Essence of Trees* (1986) and *Mysterious Delta* (2006); and the layered schemas and wandering plant tendrils of *Sunken Track* (1981) and *Bouquet* (2007). These memoranda thus display strong abstract qualities, somewhat challenging our expectations of observational drawing. As mere 'short cuts' back to nature, they nicely exemplify the strong command Heathcote has in mentally organising the information before him. Though he may have dispensed with the life study, being familiar enough now with the human form, his continual sketching of Kent represents an undying wish to rediscover 'home', and thus to harvest further memories and imaginings.



Essence of Trees, 1986, graphite on paper, 15 x 20 cm



Mysterious Delta, 2006, oil on board, 29 x 39 cm



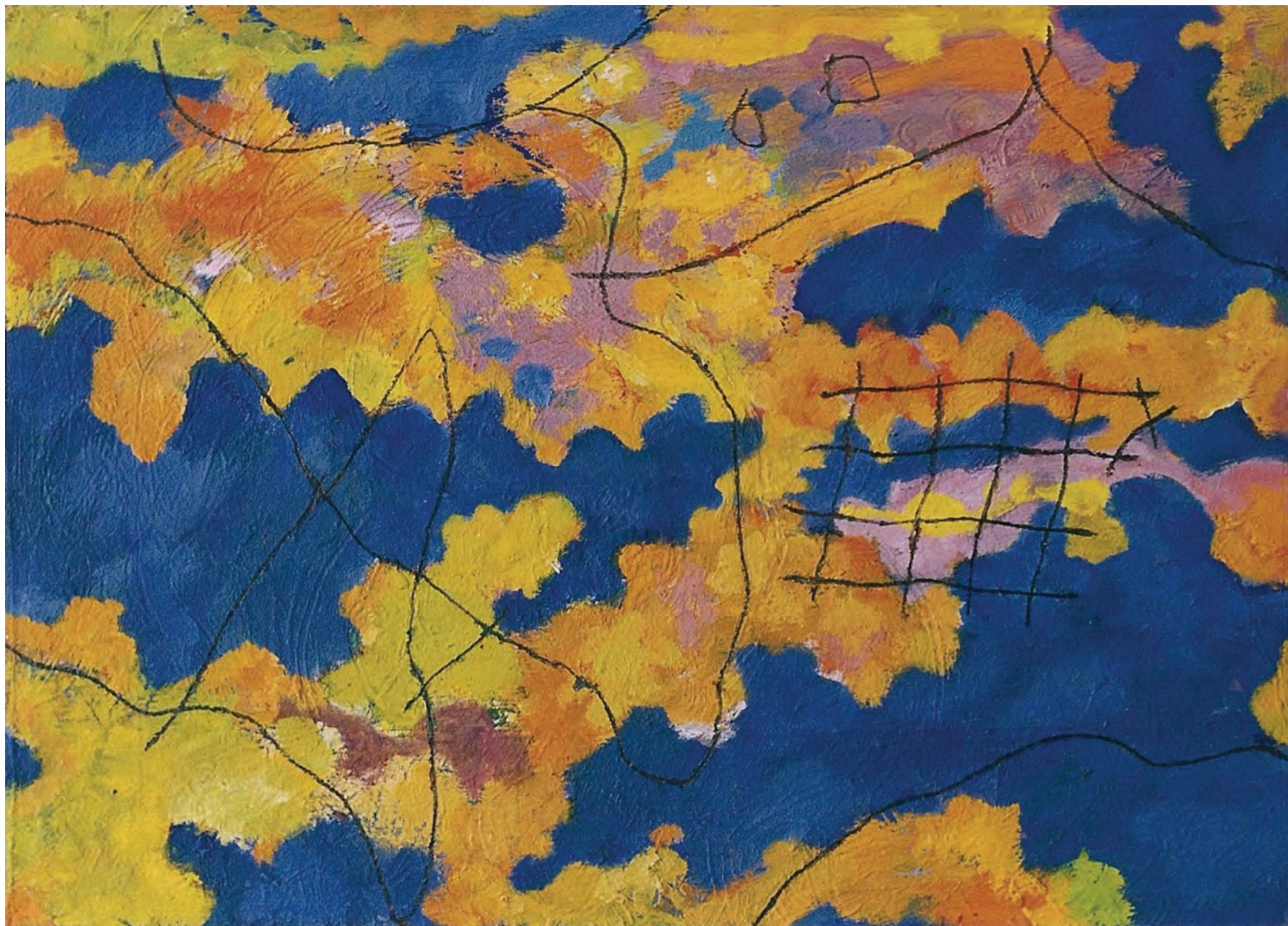
Tower, 1989, graphite on paper, 15 x 20 cm



Spatial Poem, 1994, acrylic on canvas, 61 x 76 cm

1. David Heathcote Interview with Alana Pryce and Nicholas Usherwood, *Clear Spot*, Resonance FM, 14 February 2011.
2. Ibid.
3. David Heathcote Interview with Julia Beaumont-Jones, 23 January 2014.
4. Ibid; line from Rudyard Kipling's *The English Flag*, 1891.
5. David Heathcote Interview with Julia Beaumont-Jones, 23 January 2014.
6. David Heathcote Interview with Alana Pryce and Nicholas Usherwood, *Clear Spot*, Resonance FM, 14 February 2011.
7. David Heathcote Slide Presentation, *Beyond Horizons*, Galerie Beckel Odille Boïcos, Paris, 21 March 2013.
8. David Heathcote Interview with Julia Beaumont-Jones, 23 January 2014.
9. David Heathcote Interview with Alana Pryce and Nicholas Usherwood, *Clear Spot*, Resonance FM, 14 February 2011.
10. David Heathcote Interview with Julia Beaumont-Jones, 23 January 2014.
11. David Heathcote, *The Arts of the Hausa*, [Exhibition Catalogue] World of Islam Festival, Commonwealth Institute, London, 1976, p.11.
12. David Heathcote Interview with Julia Beaumont-Jones, 23 January 2014.
13. Marcel Proust *À La Recherche du Temps Perdu*, Vol. 7: *Le Temps Retrouvé*, 1927.
14. David Heathcote Interview with Julia Beaumont-Jones, 23 January 2014.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. David Heathcote Interview with Alana Pryce and Nicholas Usherwood, *Clear Spot*, Resonance FM, 14 February 2011.
25. David Heathcote Interview with Julia Beaumont-Jones, 23 January 2014.

PAINTINGS & ETCHINGS



Remembered Journeys, 2000, oil and pencil on board, 25 x 35 cm



Mysterious Garden, 1968, oil on canvas, 76 x 91 cm



Hunters in the Snow, 1985, oil on canvas, 137 x 170 cm



Hunting in Winter, 1984, oil on canvas, 137 x 170 cm



Grimacings, 1983, etching, 51 x 66 cm



Gods of War, 1983, oil on canvas, 137 x 144 cm



Sahel, 1985, oil on canvas, 76 x 122 cm



TCR, 1982, oil on board, 91 x 122 cm



Tension, 1982, oil on canvas, 30 x 41 cm



Burning Tree, 2009, oil on canvas, 40 x 40 cm



Blue Opening, 1989, acrylic on canvas, 91 x 122 cm



Bouquet, 2007, oil on board, 29 x 39 cm



Reclining Figures, 1981, etching, 29 x 55 cm



Botanical Garden, 2007, oil on board, 49 x 65 cm



Mysterious Delta, 2006, oil on board, 29 x 39 cm



Cubist Head, 1956, etching and aquatint, 15 x 15 cm



Yellow Moon, 1994, gouache and pencil on paper, 16 x 19 cm



Mandalay, 2014, oil on canvas, 92 x 102 cm



Night Thoughts, 2009, oil on canvas, 46 x 61 cm



Festival, 2009, oil on board, 82 x 109 cm



Spatial Poem, 1994, acrylic on canvas, 61 x 76 cm



Leaving Naples, 2012, oil on board, 60 x 76 cm

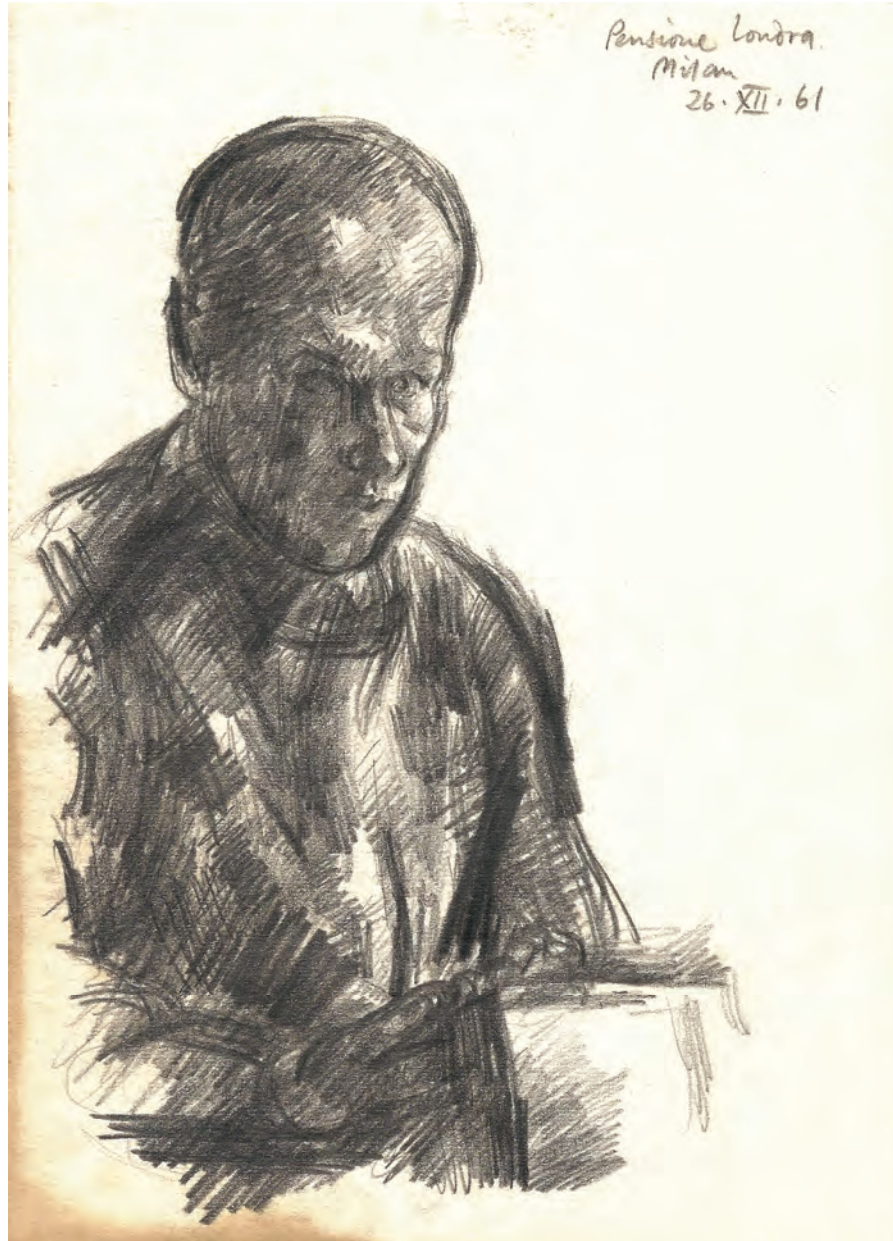


Numberless Islands, 2014, oil on canvas, 137 x 170 cm



Black Arrow, 2012, oil on board, 49 x 65 cm

DRAWINGS



Self Portrait, 1961, graphite on paper, 23 x 16 cm



Self Portrait with Hat, 1961, graphite on paper, 23 x 16 cm



Back View, 2007, ink and wash on paper, 30 x 11 cm



Short Poses, 2005, ink and crayon on paper, 16 x 21 cm



Leaning Horseman, 1988, ink on paper, 14 x 10 cm



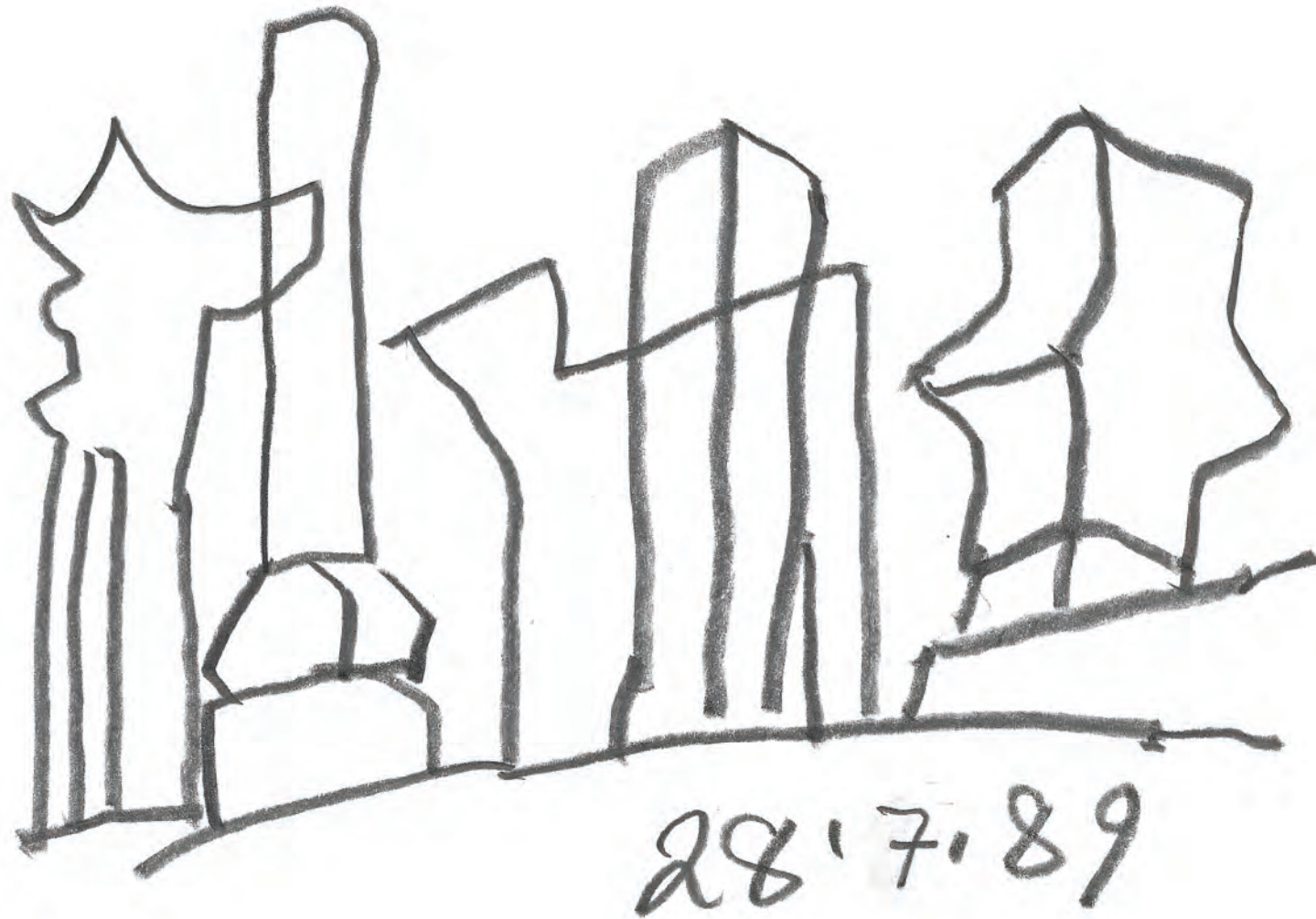
Horseman and Beggar, 1988, ink on paper, 20 x 15 cm



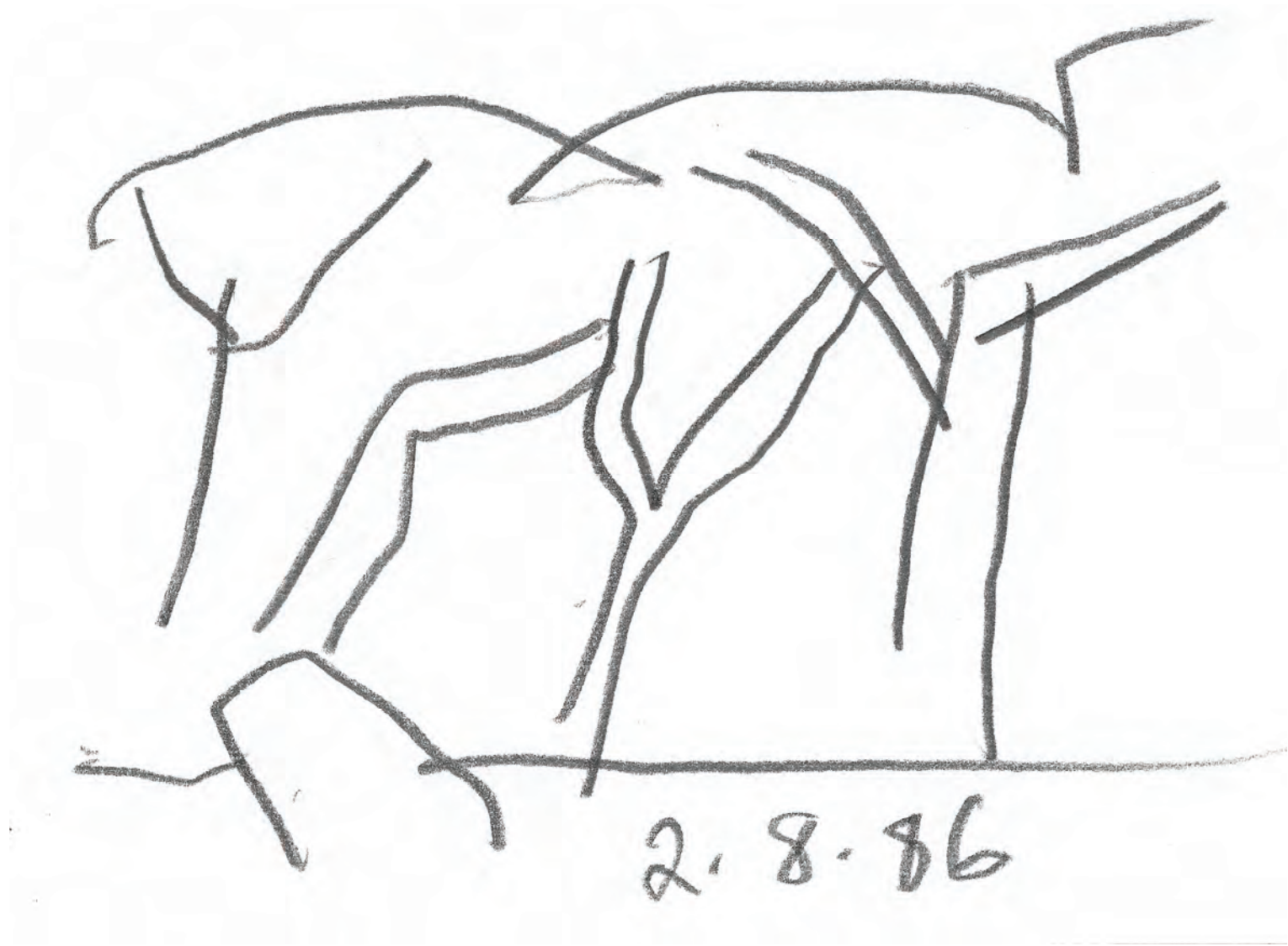
Bishopstoune, 1983, graphite on paper, 24 x 17 cm



Sunken Track, 1981, graphite on paper, 29 x 21 cm



Towering Buildings, 1989, graphite on paper, 15 x 20 cm



Essence of Trees, 1986, graphite on paper, 15 x 20 cm



Pett Bottom, 1983, graphite on paper, 15 x 20 cm



Tower, 1989, graphite on paper, 15 x 20 cm



Dutch Landscape, 1989, graphite on paper, 15 x 19 cm



Open Ground, 1989, graphite on paper, 15 x 20 cm



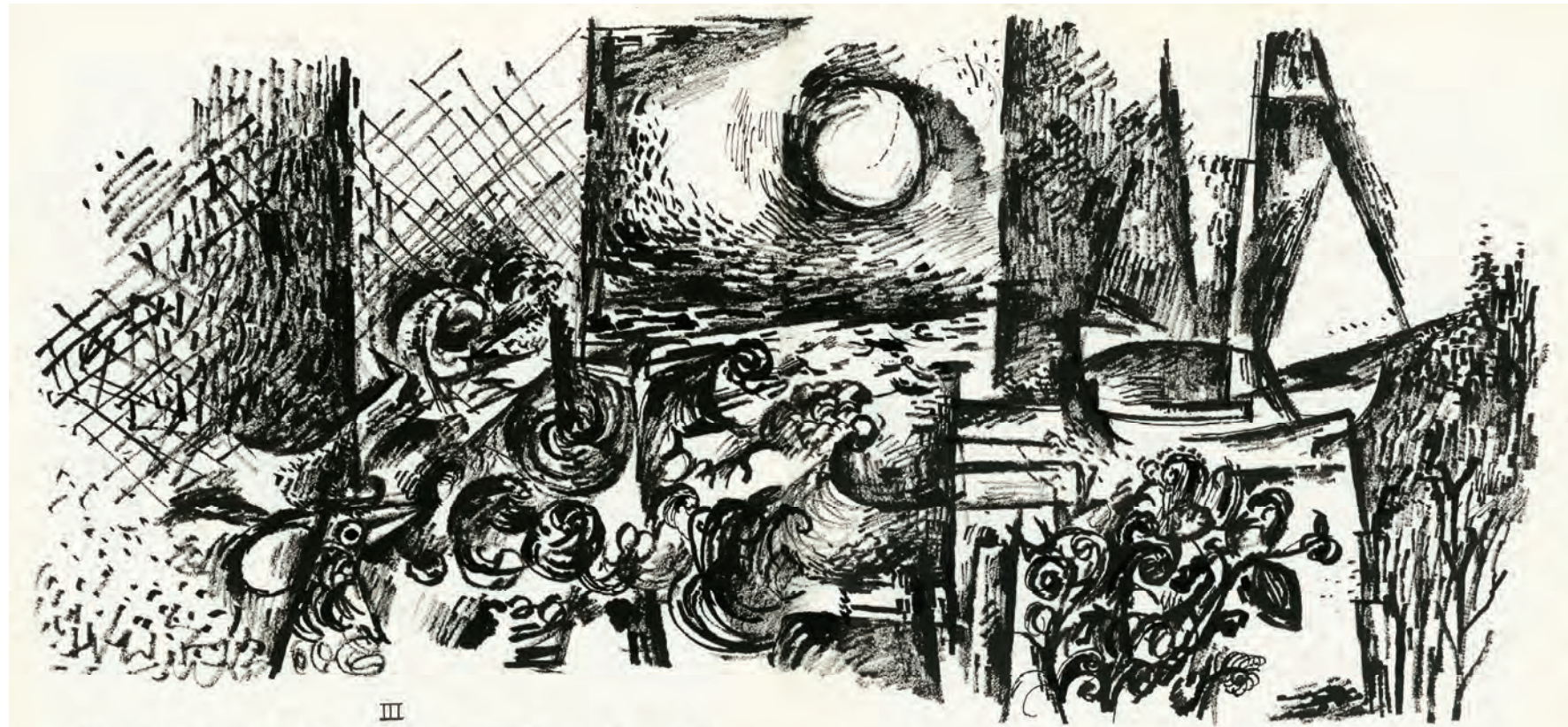
Through the Window, 2007, gouache and ink on paper, 10 x 15 cm



Downs Track, 2011, ink on paper, 21 x 26 cm



Figure at Sunrise, 1981, graphite on paper, 21 x 29 cm



III

Not far away the long band of the sea girted beyond the marshes. From a distance there was no way of telling whether or not the tide was in and as you climbed the sea wall the waves might be breaking onto the shingle or else a stretch of mud and shells a mile wide might separate the beach from the water.

In Winter and Spring it was a deserted place, except for the birds, but the sea was always different, always changing. In calm weather the tide came up with long, low waves moving in diagonally to the beach, each one spending itself gently until its whole length had turned over and left only a fine mark of foam and a noise of moving shingle. When they came in with a strong wind the waves seemed to be forming up far out and rising up as if to see more clearly their objective. As they approached they appeared to gather speed and become impatient until they had thrown themselves on to the beach in an explosion of surf and rattling pebbles.

Across the water was the Island, from this distance a landscape of rich fields and luxuriant trees; a remote and magic place pointing out through the estuary towards the sea.

Then, if you walked westwards along the top of the sea wall you could reach the strange, winding creeks, some wide enough to get a boat through but all becoming, quite suddenly, narrow, sinuous ditches with overhanging, clay banks. There were short plants here, thickly covering the ground and turning everything a dull red when they flowered. It was a cryptic landscape, reserved and secretive. There was, in a way, a feeling of less-than-notingness about it and I used to call it "The Negative Place."

Deliberate Holiday: Shore, 1958, ink on paper, 39 x 56 cm

David Heathcote: An artist's life in summary

1931

Born Westminster, where my father, Fred, works as a private secretary. His employer is the Art Nouveau artist, Walter Spindler (1878-1940), best remembered today for his very fine portraits of the actress Sarah Bernhardt. When Fred marries, Walter very generously offers the couple his apartment in Victoria Street and moves to the Grosvenor Hotel. Later, while still a child, I visit London and meet Walter Spindler again.

1933-37

We move to Whitstable, then to the country village of Yorkletts, a few miles away. We have a large garden, and many animals. The countryside is very quiet. I love quietness, and never bother to own a radio until I am over 35. Even during our 12 years in Nigeria, my wife and I have no radio, television or newspaper, except a surface-mail edition of *The Listener*.

1936-1947

Schooling in Whitstable, and Faversham Grammar School. During 1946-47, on our old gearless bikes, a friend and I make day trips to Hastings (102 miles) and Chelmsford (135 miles). Neither of us being swimmers, we take off, unprepared, to row from Whitstable to Sheppey just as the tide turns against us. We have to row like maniacs for hours to avoid being swept out to the North Sea before we can get across. Searching in the 'cleared' minefield near my home, I find a bag of blasting gelatine. I try a small piece on a friend's red-hot stove; it is very effective. Memorable alarm at the police station when I hand it in. A Russian woman offers to teach me the piano; we have no piano. I shall have lasting regrets that I never become involved in music. In 1946, the new Scottish art master at Faversham Grammar asks me what I plan to do on

leaving. I say, 'I don't know. I just want to leave.' He says, 'I think you should go to art school' (my only experience of career advice).

1947-51

I am accepted at Canterbury School of Art and, on the first day, after the pencil-and-paper art programme of Faversham Grammar, realise that this is what I want to do. I train as a painter, and am inspired by the work of Degas and Cezanne, Watteau and Chagall. Though my efforts at objective painting seem unpromising, I learn a great deal about drawing and painting from my tutor, Jim Palmer, an enthusiastic teacher who was to remain a good friend.

1951-53

A National Service commission in the Royal Air Force. I don't regret it, and spend some of my spare time doing a little painting and trying to learn Italian. When I leave I work at various jobs in London. I am accepted, probably on the strength of my drawing, at both the Royal Academy Schools and the Slade.

1955-57

A painting student at the Slade, where I have the old problem with objective painting, and can't find my way until I develop an interest in Cubism, when the feeling of being able to structure and control a painting brings a sense of creative strength. At last, I have some hope of a future as a creative artist. I am now 26.

In 1959, I move to Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) to teach at Peterhouse, then St Augustine's, Penhalonga, and in Harare, Mutare and Bulawayo.

1960-67

Teaching at Peterhouse. I do not enjoy it. My painting becomes expressionist. I have my first one-man exhibition in 1961. A failed marriage, and two daughters. After my divorce, I meet Janet just before I move to Nigeria to teach art history. We are married a year later and have a daughter in 1971. Increasing commitment to research into Hausa art eats up my creative life. What painting I do now is still essentially Europe-inspired. When I settle in England again, it is extremely Africa-inspired.

In 1961 I take up a short Italian art scholarship in Rome, and then return to Africa.

1967-1979

I move to northern Nigeria to take charge of Art History at Ahmadu Bello University, and in 1976 bring a major exhibition of Hausa art to London, part of the World of Islam Festival. I have collected all the artefacts, photographs and documentation, and written the catalogue for it.¹ My 20-minute 16mm documentary film, *Hausa Art in Northern Nigeria*, is made at this time and my doctoral thesis, *Hausa Embroidered Dress*, is finalised in 1979. Over a hundred embroidered items I have collected are later acquired by the British Museum. During my years in Nigeria I also show creative work in British Council Centres.

1979

We settle in Canterbury, and live frugally on our savings for a number of years, without jobs, and no handouts whatsoever, while I paint Africa-inspired pictures, and eventually find a part-time job at Christ Church College. I have rediscovered the countryside: cycling through it, I pause to make rapid sketches. In this period, I am increasingly drawn into making assemblages.

1983-96

Senior lecturer in the Department of Art and Design, Canterbury Christ Church University. Established a sculpture section in 1993.

On retirement in 1996 I was able to concentrate on painting and sculpture. Canterbury Christ Church University has purchased a portrait bronze of Kyung Wha Chung and a life-size bronze figure.

Long-term allegiances: Chagall, Cezanne, Cubism, early de Chirico, and Bonnard; Claude, and Watteau; Cycladic, Egyptian and African sculpture.

I have been involved with a wide range of drawing media, and with oil and acrylic paint, collage and assemblage, clay and stone. Since 2009, partly encouraged by my limited sculpture storage space, I have been concentrating on oil painting and drawing. I rarely make direct use of drawings for my paintings, which are all done from memory and imagination.

I foresee the immediate years ahead as a period of special concern with painting, although I know that at any moment I could, if needed, turn my whole attention to the making of a piece of sculpture. My range of subjects in the past habitually involved the human figure and the human head. These now concern me as a sculptor rather than a painter, and it is landscape that has become the most important subject in my painting.

1. Heathcote, David. *The Arts of the Hausa*. [Catalogue of a Commonwealth Institute exhibition : World of Islam Festival, 1976, London.] World of Islam Festival Publishing Co Ltd. London 1976. Out of print, but available in some libraries.

Selected exhibitions

- 1958 Young Contemporaries, London (painting)
- 1961 Meikles Gallery, Salisbury (now Harare) Rhodesia, (solo, paintings)
- 1961-66 National Gallery, Salisbury (Harare) Annual exhibitions (mixed, paintings, sculpture)
- 1967-78 Ahmadu Bello University and British Council Galleries in Nigeria (nine exhibitions)
- 1985 Brighton Polytechnic (with Martyn Brewster, paintings)
- 1986 Loughborough College of Art (solo, paintings)
- 1989 Museum of Mankind, London (solo, terracotta sculptures)
- 1989 Gallery Shurini, Lower Regent Street, London (mixed, paintings)
- 1990 Gallery 92, Portobello Road area (mixed, gouaches)
- 1993-2006 Canterbury Festivals (annual outdoor showing of a new sculpture)
- 1994 Marjorie Parr Gallery, Chelsea (mixed, collages on paper)
- 1995 Canterbury Royal Museum (mixed exhibitions at its 3 local galleries)
- 2000 Metropole Arts Centre, Folkestone (solo, large 50-year retrospective - with Arts Council grant)
- 2006 The Gallery in Cork Street (mixed, bronze of the violinist Kyung Wha Chung)
- 2007 University of Kent at Canterbury (solo show, mostly large abstract paintings)
- 2008 GV Art gallery, London, begins representing David Heathcote
- 2011 GV Art gallery, London. Solo show *Beyond Horizons*
- 2013 Galerie Beckel Odille Boïcos, Paris. Solo show of paintings, sculpture, drawings
- 2014 GV Art gallery, London. Solo show *Numberless Islands* with the artist's film *Hausa Art in Northern Nigeria (1978)*.

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David Heathcote

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GV Art gallery, London

49 Chiltern Street, London W1U 6LY

Tel : 020 8408 9800 Email : info@gvart.co.uk Web : www.gvart.co.uk

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