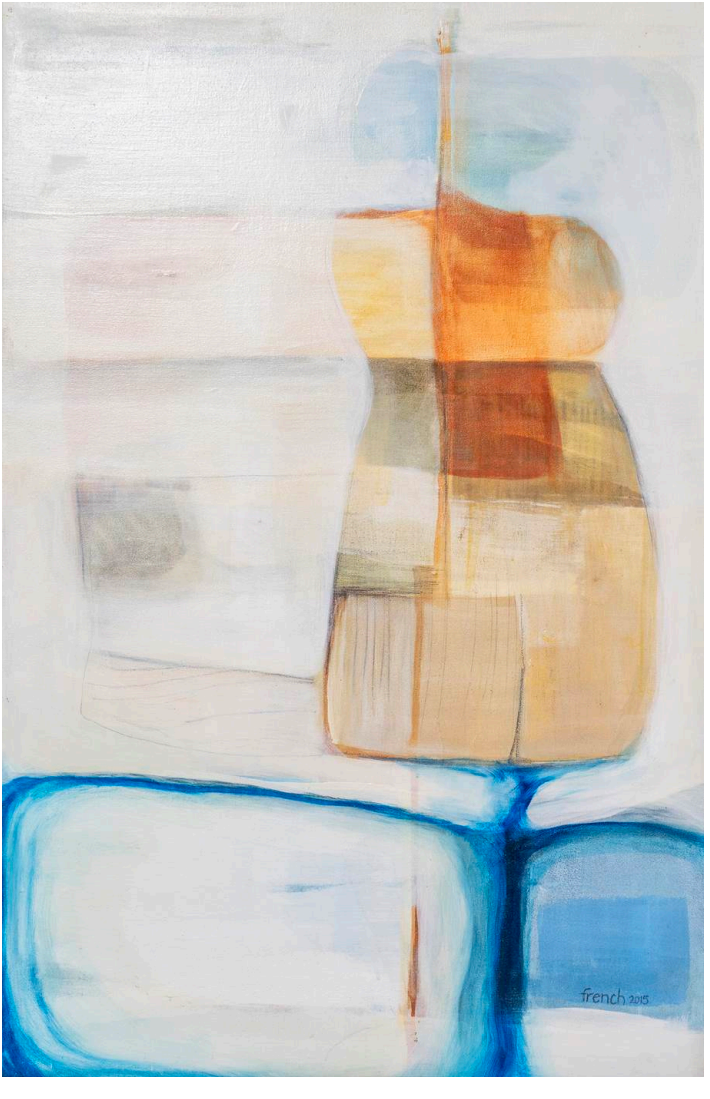
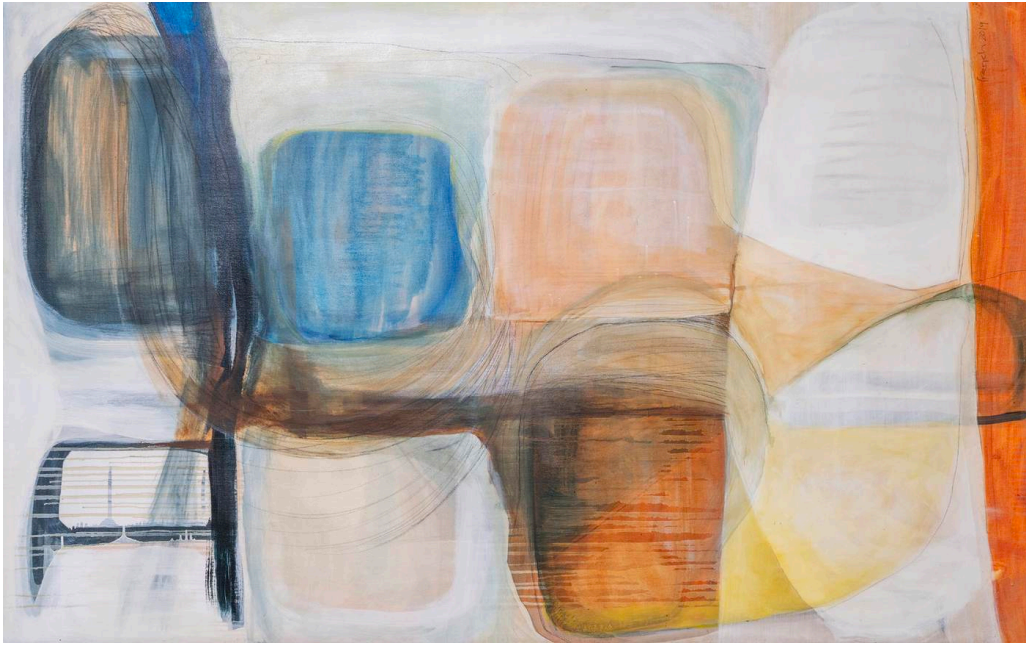
olly french

the songs we used to sing






french 2015



above
door to the river | mixed media on canvas | 1060 x 1700 mm | 2019

left
hollow men | mixed media on canvas | 870 x 570 mm | 2015

There is a space beyond words and language and outside of symbolism and representation. Skirting the edges of that space is a type of hypnagogia, where a confluence of the suggested forms, elements of colour, lines, space and depth bought about by the artist, and the perceptions, experiences and intuitions of the spectator meet. Between the artist's rich lexicon and the vulnerability of the viewer, a wordless dialogue is invoked and a fertile place of meaning emerges. Here, there is nostalgia. Here, there is memory. Here also, are the traces of shared experiences, connections, trauma and vulnerability. Predictably, contradictions are inherent; elements of loneliness, isolation and alienation also inhabit this place.

In this place, the present is always, inevitably and unceasingly, the past. Enshrined within this place, amidst the complexities and harmony, the almost-defined, allusions and veiled ideas, are the songs we used to sing.

The Arches @ Aberfoyle is proud to present the first solo exhibition of Olly French. It is a body of work created over the last several years, built on the foundations of a lifetime engagement with the visual arts, design and music. He has woven together threads that have their roots within both distant memories of previous decades, with others drawn from the staggeringly complex recent past and present of his native Zimbabwe. Like any of us, moments of trauma and ecstasy become embedded within the mundane of our histories and become part of our being, located within a context in constant state of flux.

French's work is a contemplation of not only what it constitutes to *be*, but what it constitutes to *have been*, in *place* and *time*. Through multiple layers the artist explores a sense of remembering and recognition within the passage of time, ever in motion like the wake of a vessel; where the intersection of present/past is a tenuous, indefinable moment and where the transition between the clarity of the recent past and the vaguer distance is imperceptible. But the undying, expanding waves of energy go on, intersecting and impacting, becoming part of the unending dialogue of existence.

There is no claim to any universality of language; this is a personal and introspective series of works. Nevertheless, within the multitude of human endeavours the visual arts hold a particular territory, one in which a sense of non-linguistic communication is possible. Within these works, the viewer will find aspects of recognition and understanding, and it is in these elements that the true value of French's work resides. Within the harmony and occasional discord, the colour fields, forms, depths and volumes it is possible for the viewer to see that this is *our* place, *our* time, *our* history: Where you have been, so have I; what you have seen, so too have I; what is in you, is also in me.

What French has so eloquently described, are the songs *we* used to sing.

Greg Shaw | Curator | 19 July 2024

returning to move forward | mixed media on canvas on board | 600 x 900 mm | 2020



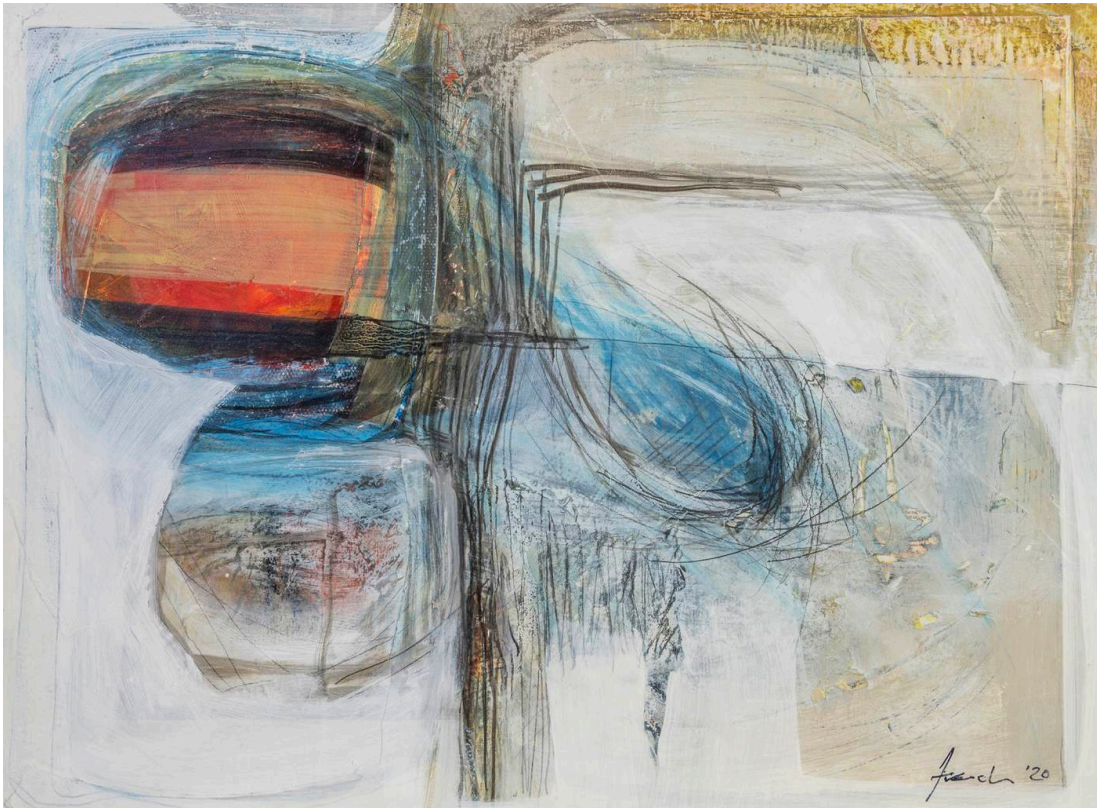
face down | mixed media on canvas | 1200 x 1200 mm | 2020

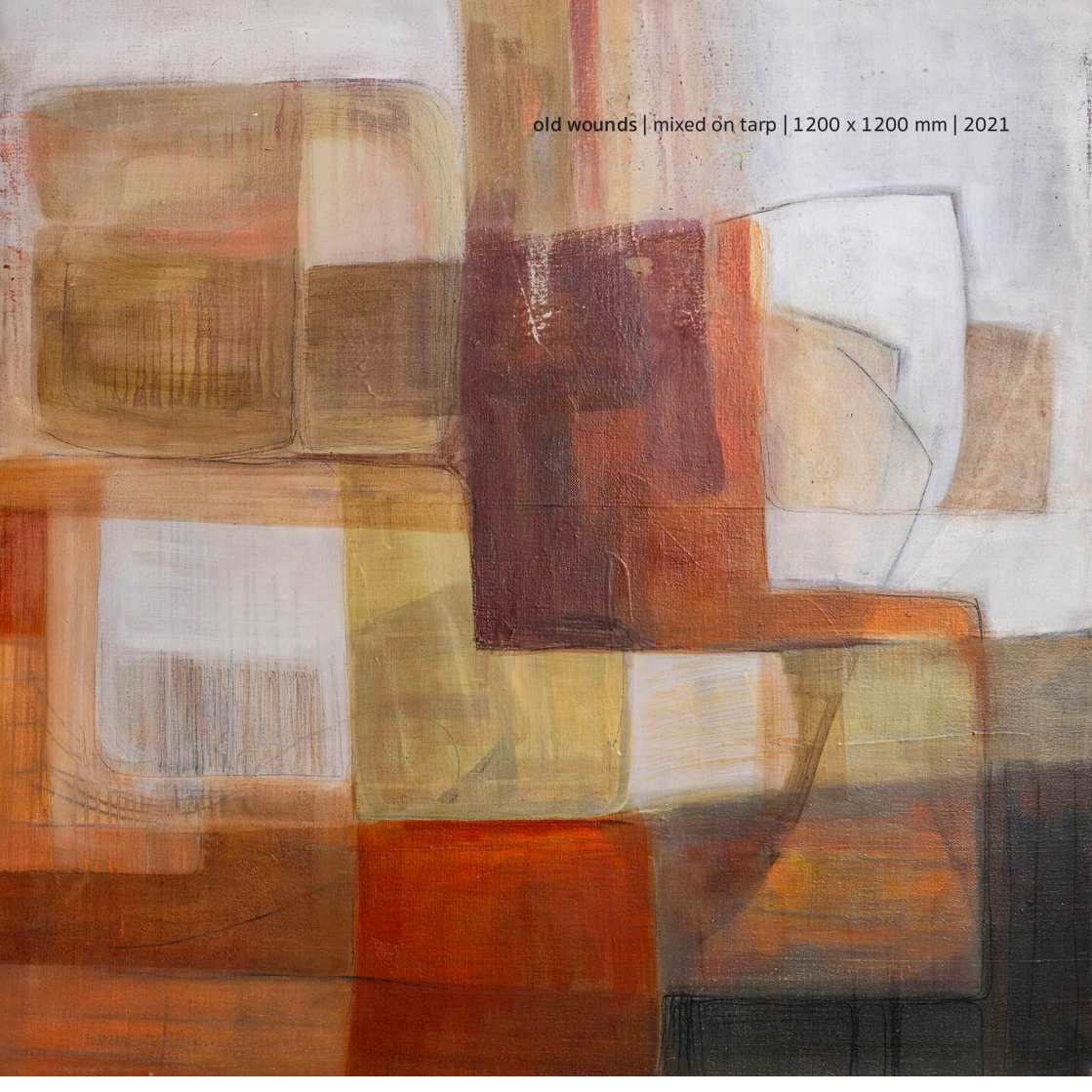


bloodied | mixed media on canvas | 640 x 1100 mm | 2020



spent force | mixed media on board | 450 x 600 mm | 2020

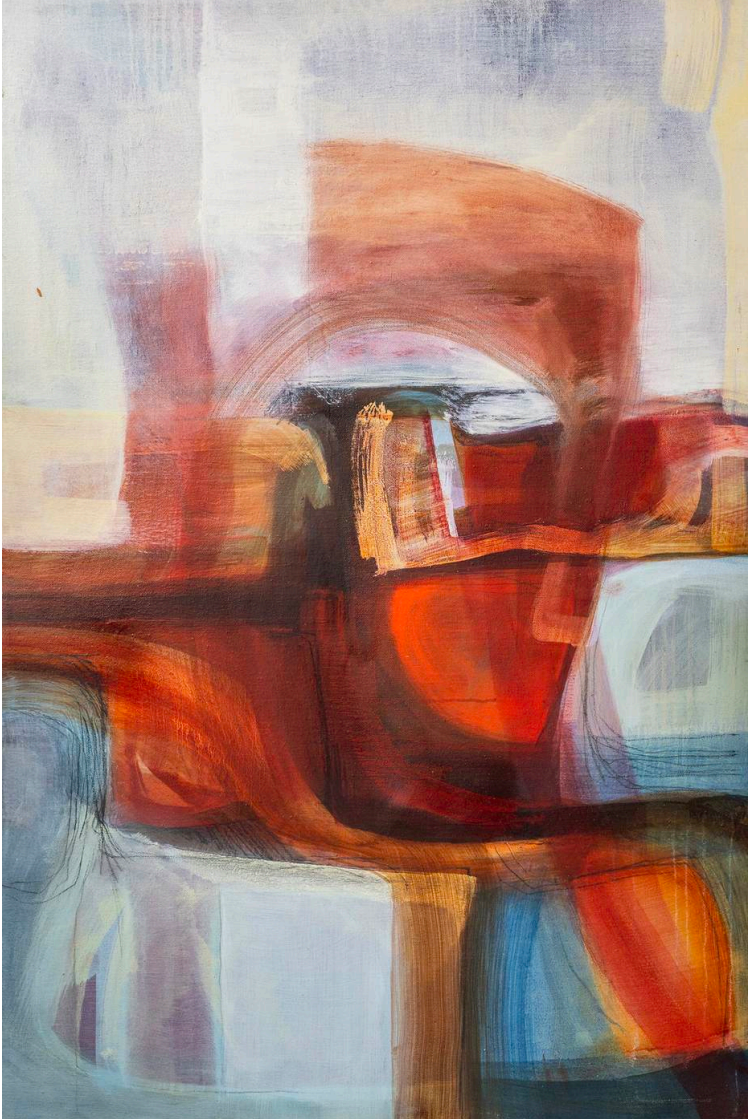




old wounds | mixed on tarp | 1200 x 1200 mm | 2021

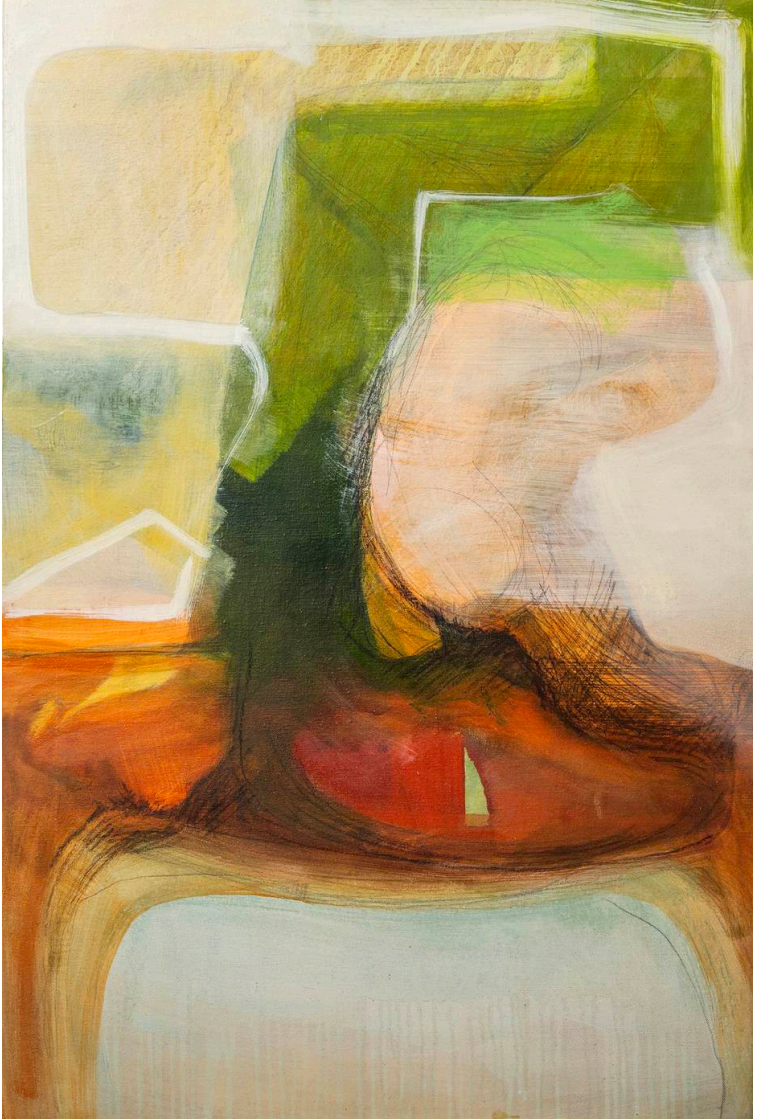


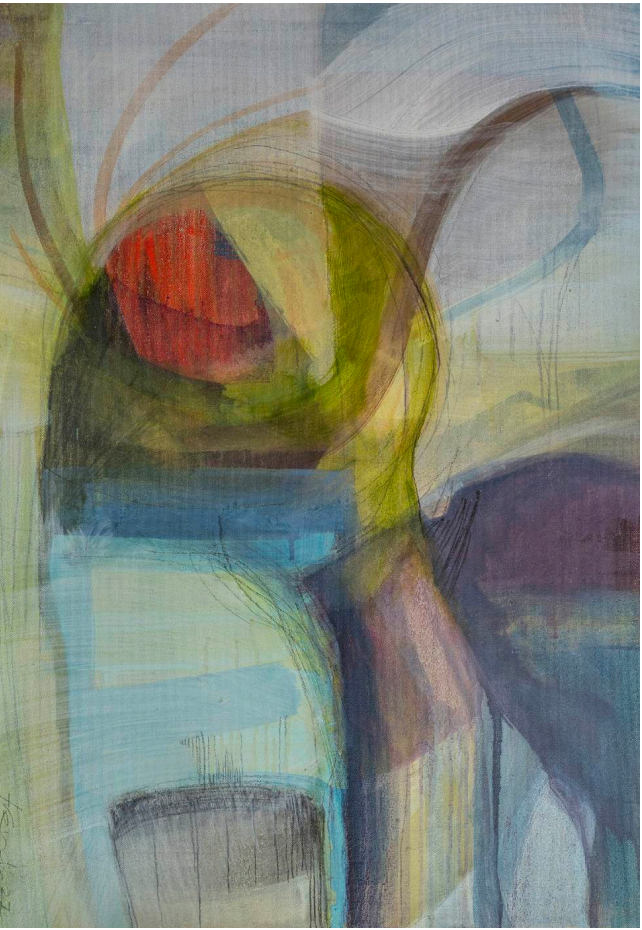
grey street
mixed media on canvas
820 x 820 mm
2022



left
setting my jaw
mixed media on canvas
900 x 600 mm
2022

right
groundswell
mixed media on canvas
900 x 600 mm
2022

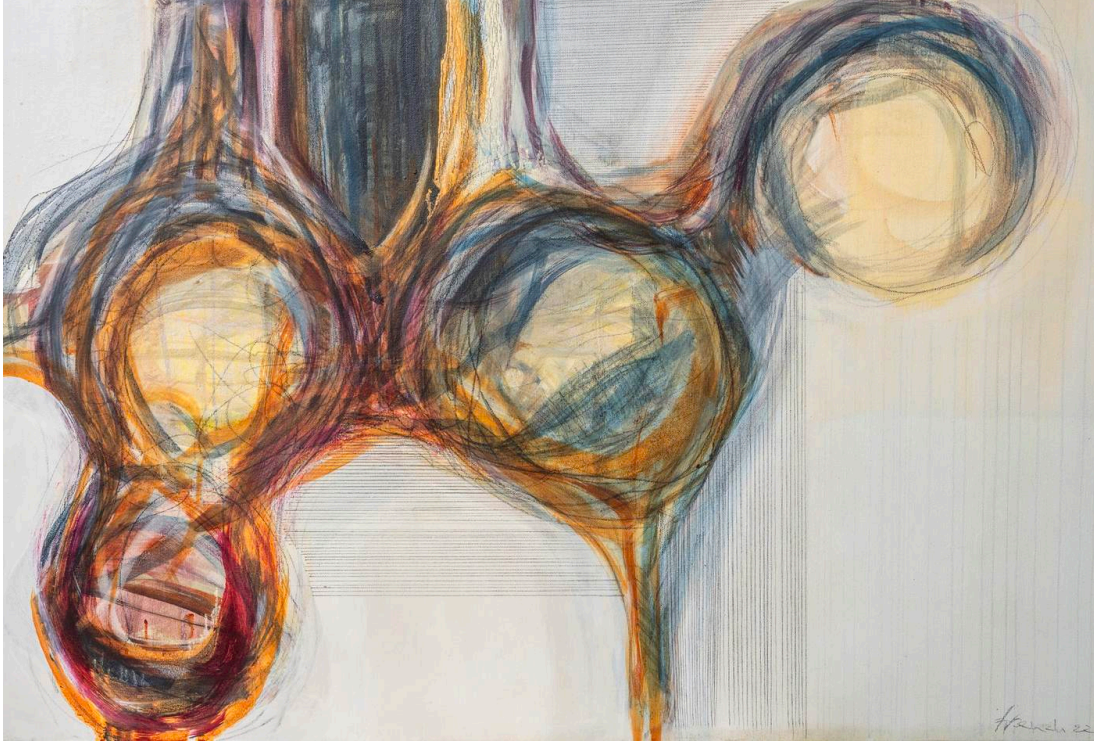




Biography | Olly French was born in Cape Town in 1972 before moving to Zimbabwe with his family two years later. He was educated at St George's College in Harare, then studied at Michaelis School of Fine Art, Cape Town, graduating with a BAFA in 1994 and returning to Zimbabwe in 1996.

Over the past decades he has maintained a strong involvement with the visual arts, exhibiting in various group exhibitions, including shows at the National Gallery of Zimbabwe in Bulawayo, Gallery Delta, Harare and more recently, the online Contemporary Art Fair, with Art Harare.

During recent years, French has maintained a prolific output, from which this collection is drawn, presented at The Arches @ Aberfoyle to form his first solo exhibition.



above
torsion | pencil, mixed media on canvas | 600 x 900 mm | 2022

left
source | mixed media on canvas covered board | 690 x 490 mm | 2022



above
divining | mixed media on canvas | 530 x 720 mm | 2023

right
engine | mixed media on canvas | 800 x 800 mm | 2023

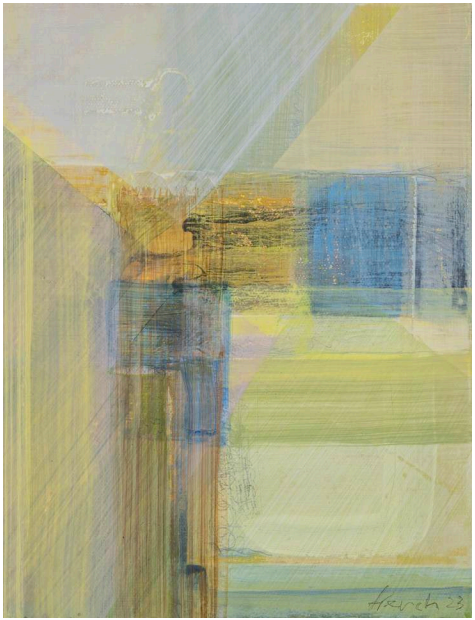

French '2

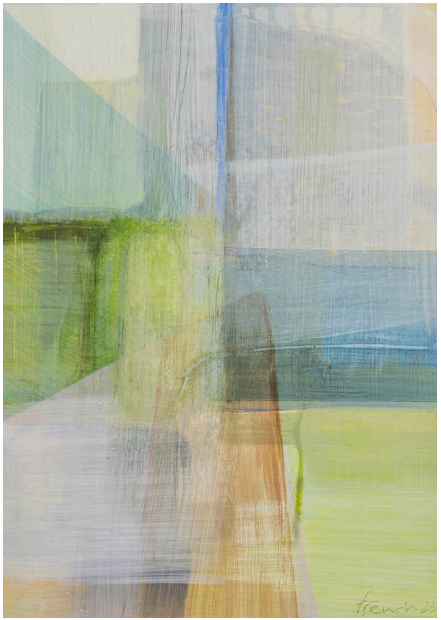


nightscape 1 | mixed media on board | 200 x 200 mm | 2023



nightscape 2 | mixed media on board | 200 x 200 mm | 2023

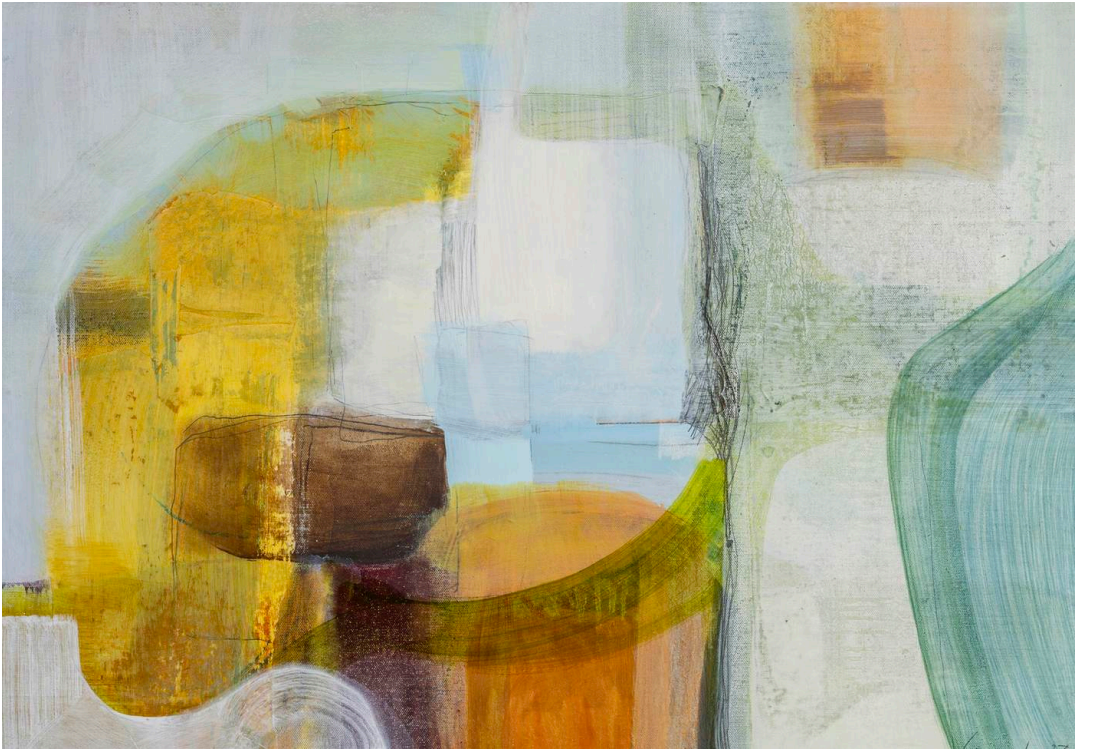


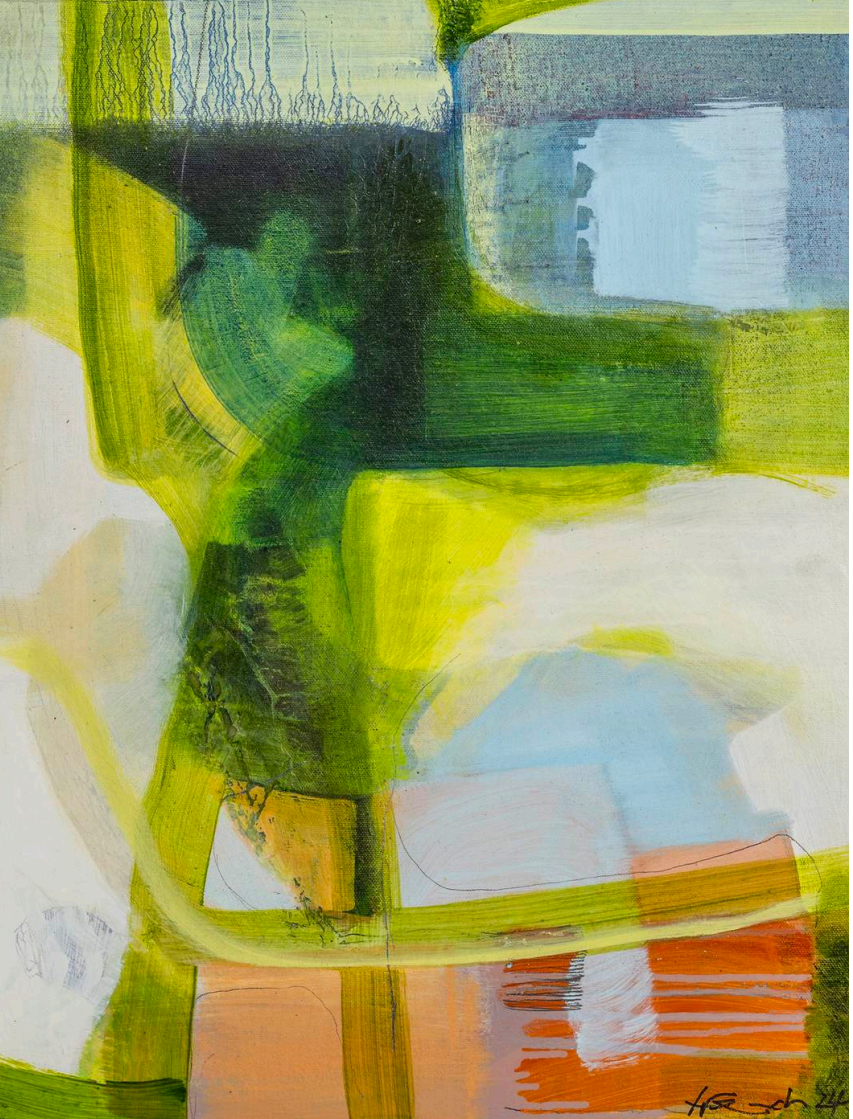


above left
Untitled Landscape 1 | mixed media on paper covered board | 440 x 220 mm | 2023

above right
Untitled Landscape 2 | mixed media on paper covered board | 440 x 220 mm | 2023

whisper | mixed media on canvas covered board | 480 x 640 mm | 2023





left
wrestle
mixed media on
canvas covered board
500 x 380 mm
2023

right
weathered
mixed media on
canvas covered board
510 x 420 mm
2024

photographs by
Chris Scott



Aberfoyle Lodge | the arches @ aberfoyle | saturday 7 september 2024



front cover with detail
the songs we used to sing | mixed media on canvas | 1100 x 640 mm | 2019

above signature detail
laden | mixed media on canvas covered board | 380 x 500 mm | 2024