



EXTRINSIC / INTRINSIC

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JAN ROYCE GALLERY
CAPE TOWN | SOUTH AFRICA
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*When next you tell of what you view
Think others see as well as you
Nor wonder if you find that none
Prefer your eyesight to his own*

-James Merrick (from The Chameleon)



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As a way of seeing or being in the world, a headdress or mask worn, may be representative or a symbolic beacon of the social mores, collective consciousness and archetypal roles in the play or enactment of the “life drama”. A headdress/mask shows the manifold sides and duality of existence: the mask projects inward and outward; it conceals and reveals; it captures and releases. It is a shape-shifter: transferring or allowing the essential and yet ever-changing nature of emotional and psychological life of ‘being’.

In *Intrinsic/Extrinsic*, I explored these notions by creating a series of headdresses/masks, using found objects such as animal bones and jaws, shells, cutlery and rope. The headdresses were then painted in uniform white blurring the line between what may be considered as sacred and the everyday object. It is a reflection of our interior realities paraded as exterior crowns, and in some cases, very literally: A spinal crown of chicken wishbones – as representative of human consumption (we are what we eat?). The white blankness also serves as a symbolic reminder of creating one’s own significance and meaning for oneself in the world. More often than not, we imprison *ourselves* by what we may perceive to be intrinsic to our own being defined by extrinsic forces - culture, tradition, religion, etc. – or what we may believe these institutions teach us about behaving like human beings. It is not the condemnation of any social institution, but rather an honesty about and to oneself of the deep-held beliefs that we accept as normality into our minds and the invisible headdresses that we wear/parade.





In the series of paintings, there is an exchange between traditional and new: echoing the history and tradition of portrait painting while reflecting the evolution of our story-telling through modern markings (tattoos): the things we honor and give meaning to. It is about redefining and fusing together fragments of culture in an eclectic and ever-changing world. *Intrinsic/Extrinsic* is a journey of interplay and making it up as you go along. It is a constant exchange and dialogue between myself, the model, and the viewer: the myriad of influences that went into creating of the headdress/mask; how the headdress was “activated” when the model was wearing or “acting” it; the interpretation and translation into a painting, the viewer imprinting his own meaning on the painting. It is unstable and always in flux, like *intrinsic* and *extrinsic*. It is forever changing in how we view the world and ourselves in it. The meaning of each headdress or mask: how do you fabricate yourself?

In essence, *Intrinsic/Extrinsic* is about a liberation of oneself in as much as it is an owning of oneself. It is the acknowledgment that one can never truly stand out of your biases and judgements, but knowing this, may provide a deeper level of freedom from the construction and instructions of a way of being in the world. “...that man, suddenly realizing that he does not understand, will begin to understand. Therefore the only task left to man is to tear off all that dead skin until he finds himself in the hour of the great nakedness” (Esslin. *The Theatre of the Absurd*. 1980: 96).







Siren's Veil

2016

Oil on wood

78 x 94.5cm (framed)



Antler Phantom

2016

Oil on wood

78 x 94.5cm (framed)







Rembrandt Messiah

2016

Oil on wood

78 x 94.5cm (framed)



Dandelion's Gold

2016

Oil on wood

78 x 94.5cm (framed)

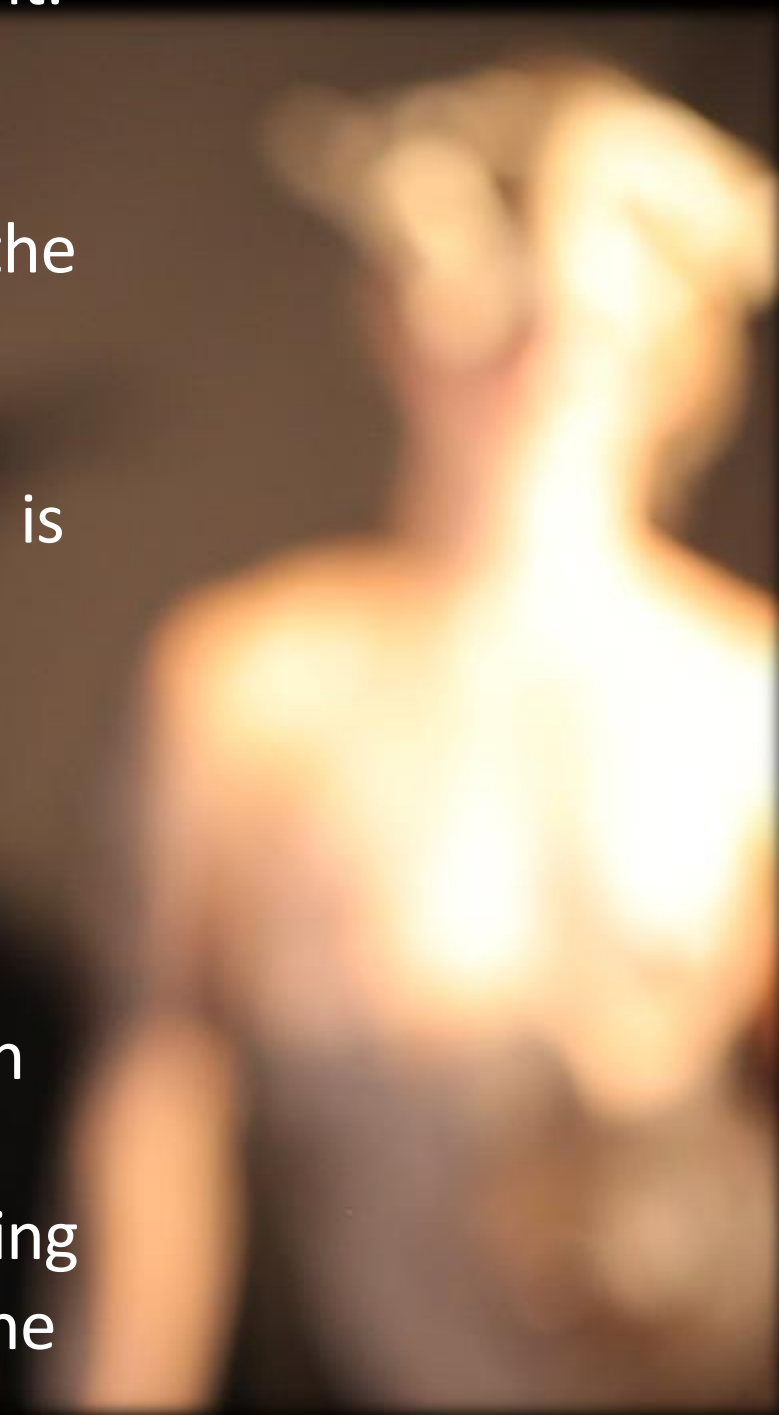


*A work of art is the expression of an
incommunicable reality that one tries
to communicate – and which sometimes can be
communicated. That is its
paradox and its truth*

-Tynan (Esslin. Theatre of the Absurd)



In an attempt to explain the reality that I try to express through my art, I feel that it may be best described by a shared affinity to the ideas expressed within the Theatre of the Absurd and the philosophy of existentialism. Existentialism focuses on the meaning of existence. It had its origin in the literary works of philosophers like Soren Kierkegaard, Jean-Paul Sartre, Martin Heidegger, Gabriel Marcel, Friedrich Nietzsche and Albert Camus, among others. In *The Theater of the Absurd* Martin Esslin (1980) talks about common themes which emerged from their work; that is the absurdity and irrationality of life; language as a defective tool to convey true meaning; the challenge of being truly authentic and critically questioning mainstream beliefs and convention. The Theatre of the Absurd expresses the human condition and the ultimate uncertainty of it all. It holds our *human need* to make sense of things up in the light. It shows the roles that we have created, that we fervently act out and believe without question. More than any other form of theatre, it shows the 'behind the scenes'. Indeed, it *is* the 'behind the scenes'. Like the Theatre of the Absurd, my paintings do not disguise the *strings that pulls the puppet*. A backdrop is often included and the actor cast in the spotlight. Likewise, I also like playing around with gender role reversals where my male subjects might appear more feminine and females are often painted with props reminiscent of phallic shapes. I introduce children's plastic farm animals and distort the size scale between these animals and my human subjects. It is about disrupting the hierarchy between various forms of being – us and them. In fact, my art is about becoming or the 'acting out' of the *other*







Study of headdress i

2016

Oil paint and pigment ink on Fabriano oil paper

72 x 88.5cm (framed)

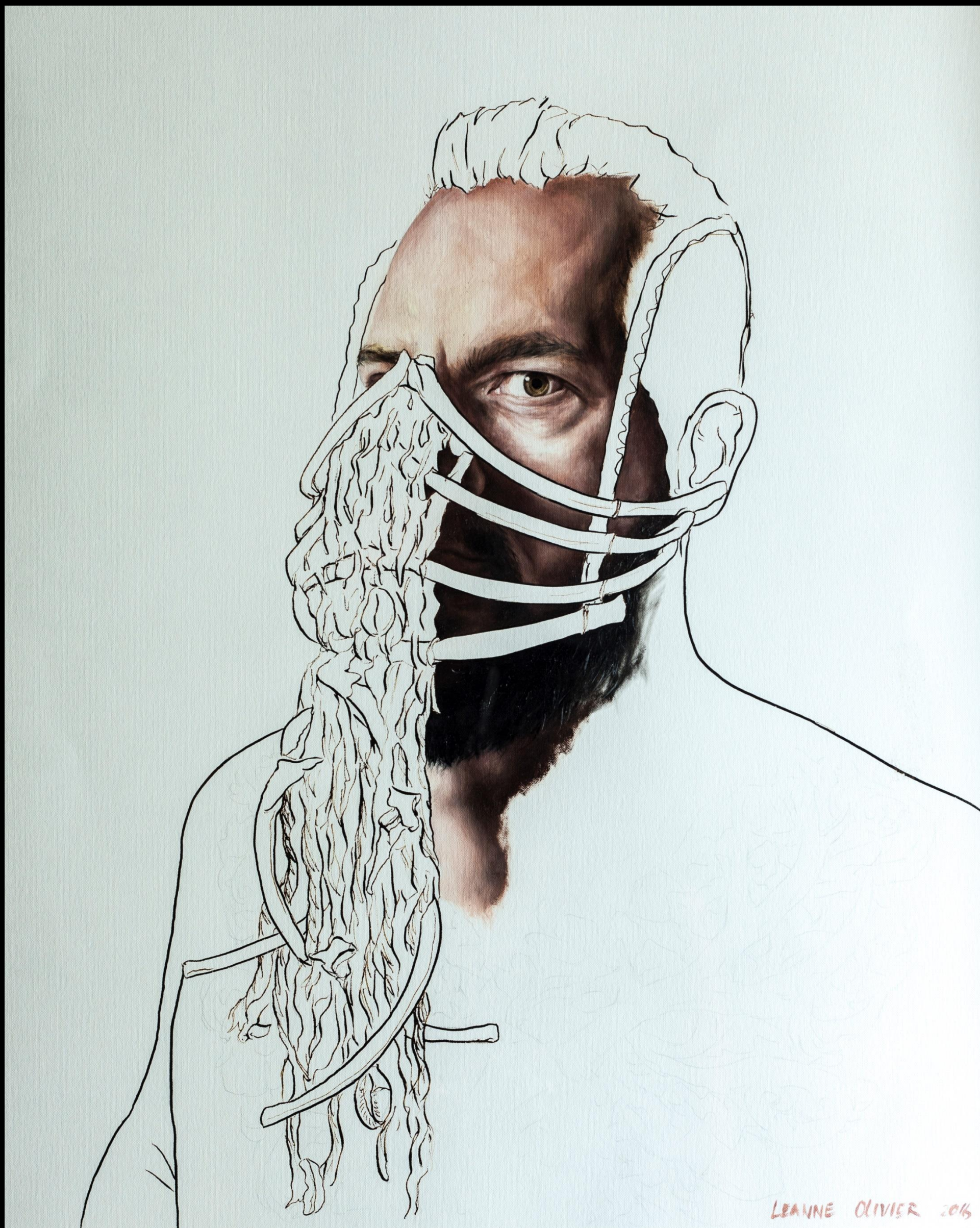


Study of headdress ii

2016

Oil paint and pigment ink on Fabriano oil paper

72 x 88.5cm (framed)



Study of headdress iii

2016

Oil paint and pigment ink on Fabriano oil paper

72 x 88.5cm (framed)

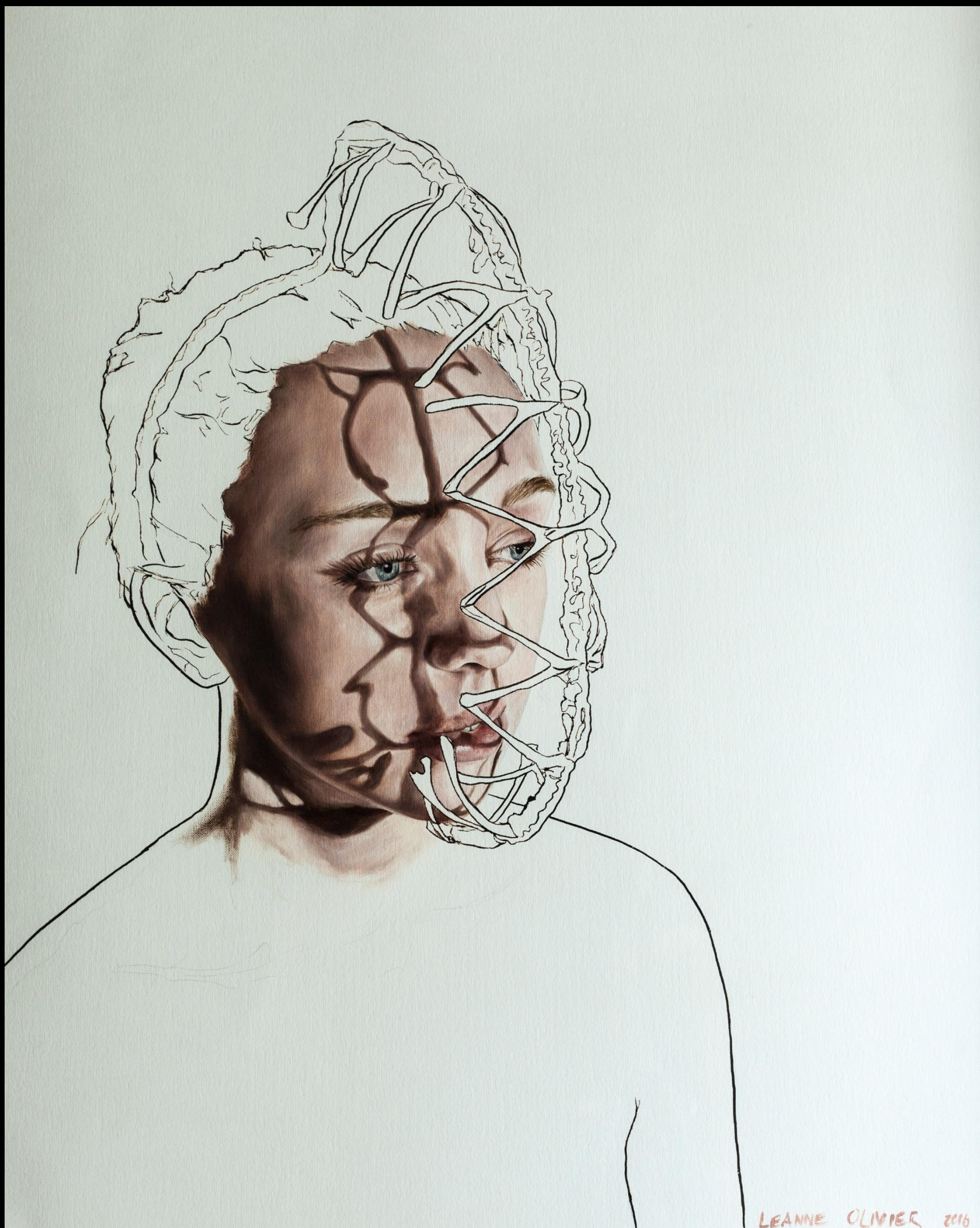


Study of headdress iv

2016

Oil paint and pigment ink on Fabriano oil paper

72 x 88.5cm (framed)

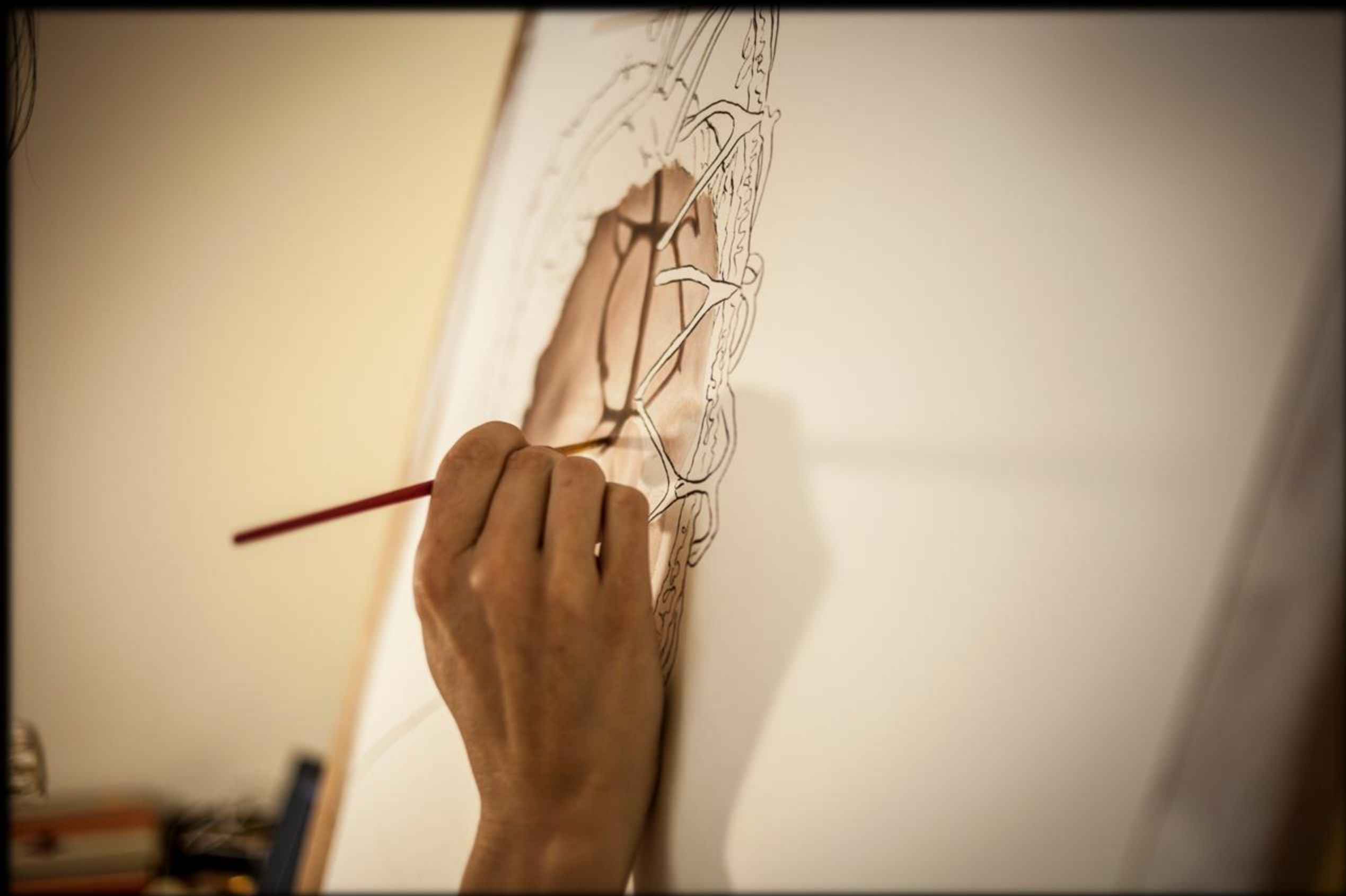


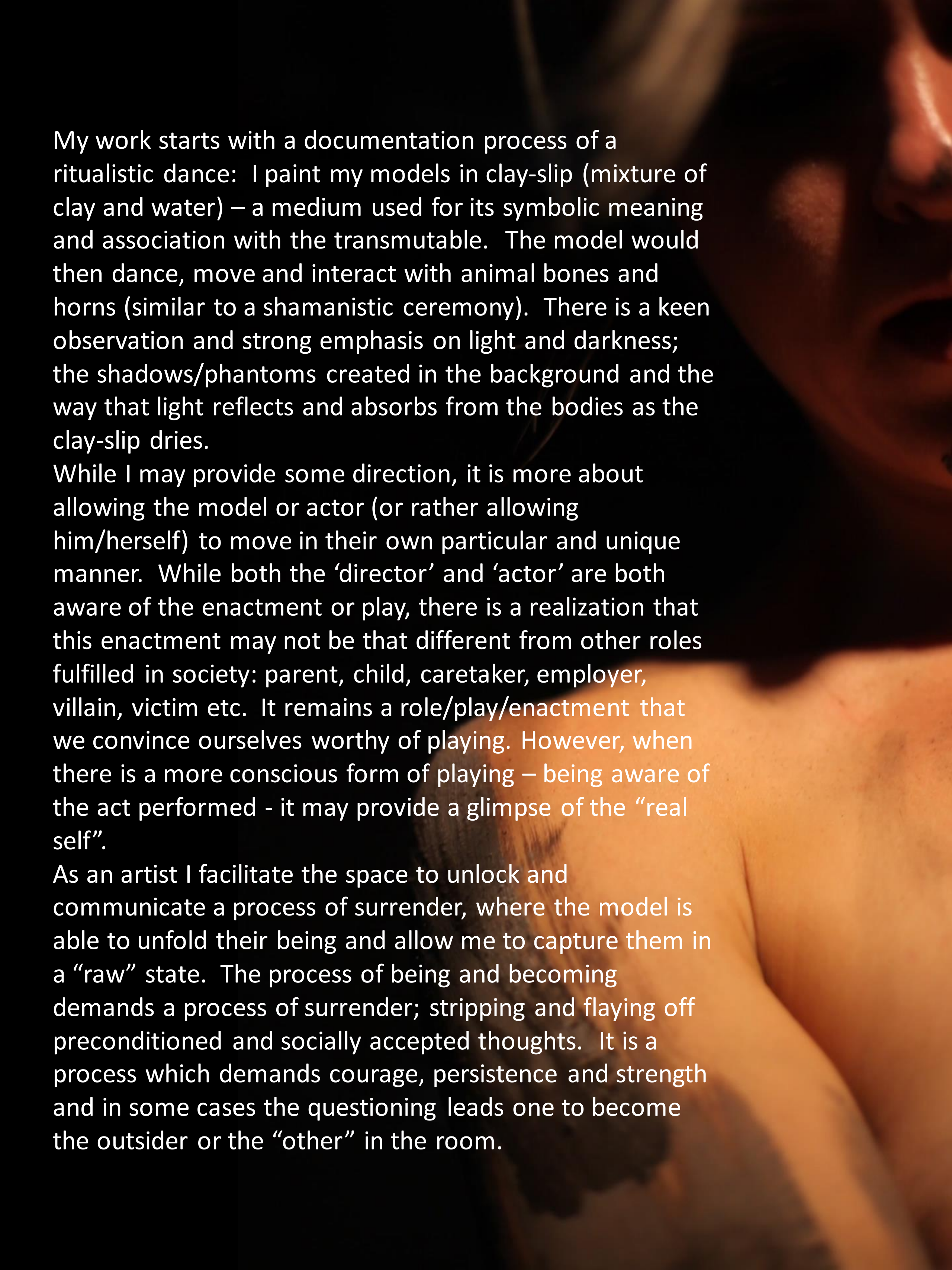
Study of headdress v

2016

Oil paint and pigment ink on Fabriano oil paper

72 x 88.5cm (framed)





My work starts with a documentation process of a ritualistic dance: I paint my models in clay-slip (mixture of clay and water) – a medium used for its symbolic meaning and association with the transmutable. The model would then dance, move and interact with animal bones and horns (similar to a shamanistic ceremony). There is a keen observation and strong emphasis on light and darkness; the shadows/phantoms created in the background and the way that light reflects and absorbs from the bodies as the clay-slip dries.

While I may provide some direction, it is more about allowing the model or actor (or rather allowing him/herself) to move in their own particular and unique manner. While both the ‘director’ and ‘actor’ are both aware of the enactment or play, there is a realization that this enactment may not be that different from other roles fulfilled in society: parent, child, caretaker, employer, villain, victim etc. It remains a role/play/enactment that we convince ourselves worthy of playing. However, when there is a more conscious form of playing – being aware of the act performed - it may provide a glimpse of the “real self”.

As an artist I facilitate the space to unlock and communicate a process of surrender, where the model is able to unfold their being and allow me to capture them in a “raw” state. The process of being and becoming demands a process of surrender; stripping and flaying off preconditioned and socially accepted thoughts. It is a process which demands courage, persistence and strength and in some cases the questioning leads one to become the outsider or the “other” in the room.







Remnants of wishes

2017

Oil on canvas

101 x 126.5cm





The Composer

2017

Oil on canvas

101 x 126.5cm



Currently residing in Pretoria, Leanne Olivier (born 1986) completed her Bachelor of Technology in Fine Arts (cum laude) in 2012 at the Tshwane University of Technology. During 2014 and 2015 she was appointed as a part-time lecturer in drawing, art theory and gallery curator in the Department of Visual Arts at the Tshwane University of Technology. Since 2016, she has been practicing as a full-time artist and participated in various group and solo exhibitions in South Africa.

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