



Lamentations
and
Beyond:
Healing
Through Art

LAMENTATIONS ARE EXPRESSIONS OF DEEP GRIEF —

a nearly inconsolable amalgam of loss, suffering, pain, and sorrow.

By historical standards, most Americans nowadays experience unparalleled material wealth. This includes access to ample food, safe tap water, sanitary indoor plumbing, heating and air conditioning, a modicum of modern medical and dental care, opportunities for entertainment and travel, a car, a personal computer, antibiotics, antihistamines, aspirin, and other readily available over-the-counter anodynes.

Yet Americans spend over \$11 billion on doctor-prescribed antidepressants and an additional \$4 billion or more on anti-anxiety drugs. If one adds in annual alcohol sales of \$90 billion and another \$60 billion dollars in illegal drug purchases, this totals at least \$165 billion spent on trying to feel a little better about life and one's situation.

Unfortunately, booze acts as a depressant on the brain and nervous system, and most "happy pills" mitigate all deep feelings — like love and sexual desire.



The real inconvenient truth is that there is an inherent and unavoidable sadness to the human condition. Everyone we love and everything we cherish perishes in a relatively short period of time. Including ourselves.

Consumer culture has tried with great vigor and ingenuity to distract us from this stark reality with various transient pleasures, potions, and a plethora of psychotherapies — all claiming to have "the answer" to what ails you.

When Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 B.C., the Jews were dragged off to slavery in Babylon. The most profound communal response to this tragedy was the creation of the Book of Lamentations. It is a text that still is held as sacred by both religious Jews and Christians. Even as a modern, secular Jew, these ancient words resonate with me.

Other related texts in the Old Testament, like the Psalms and the books of Job and Ecclesiastes, also can console our spirits in these increasingly precarious and bewildering times. One does not need to believe in an all-powerful deity to be moved by religiously inspired poetry and symbolism.

Like virtually all people who have managed to live into their 60s, I have known my share of grief. My response to these difficult moments has always been art. The words of the philosopher, John Armstrong, seem especially apt: "Art reminds us of the legitimate place of sorrow in a good life, so that we recognize our difficulties as elements of any noble existence... To say that art is therapeutic is not to suggest that it shares therapy's methods but rather its underlying ambition: to help us to cope better with existence."

I hope that the following images, poems, and quotes pique your interest and reflect our shared humanity.

As ever,
Bob Barancik
January 2, 2014



*Perhaps the earth can teach us
as when everything seems dead in winter
and later proves to be alive.*

Pablo Neruda



Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble.

He cometh forth like a flower, And is cut down.

Job Cries Out, Old Testament



It's important to care
and to try, even tho
the effects of one's
caring and trying may
be absurd, futile, or so
woven into the future as
to be undetectable.

Harvard Grant Study of Men





The news we hear is full of grief for that future, but the real news inside here is that there is no news at all.

Rumi





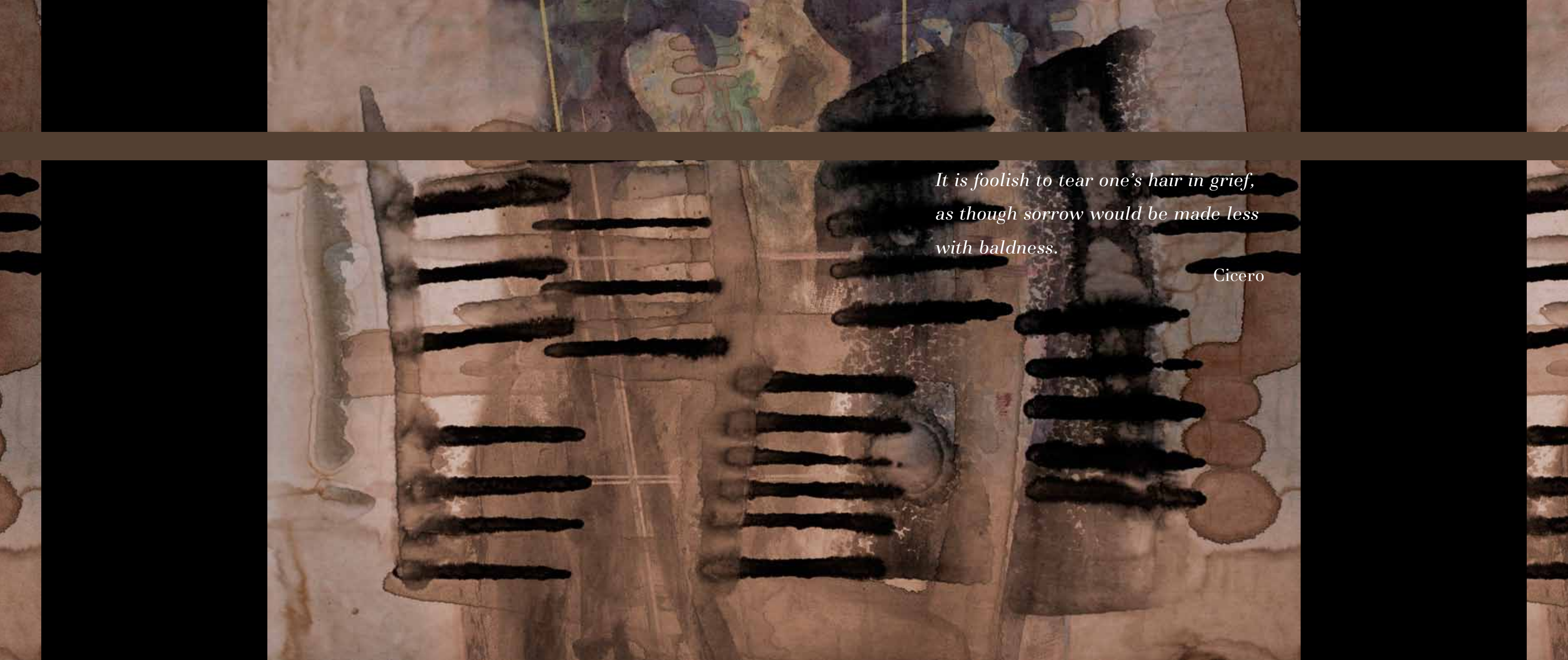
It's very hard for most of us to tolerate being loved.
Harvard Grant Study of Men



Teach me to feel joy...

as deeply
as I feel
sorrow.

Psalm 90:15



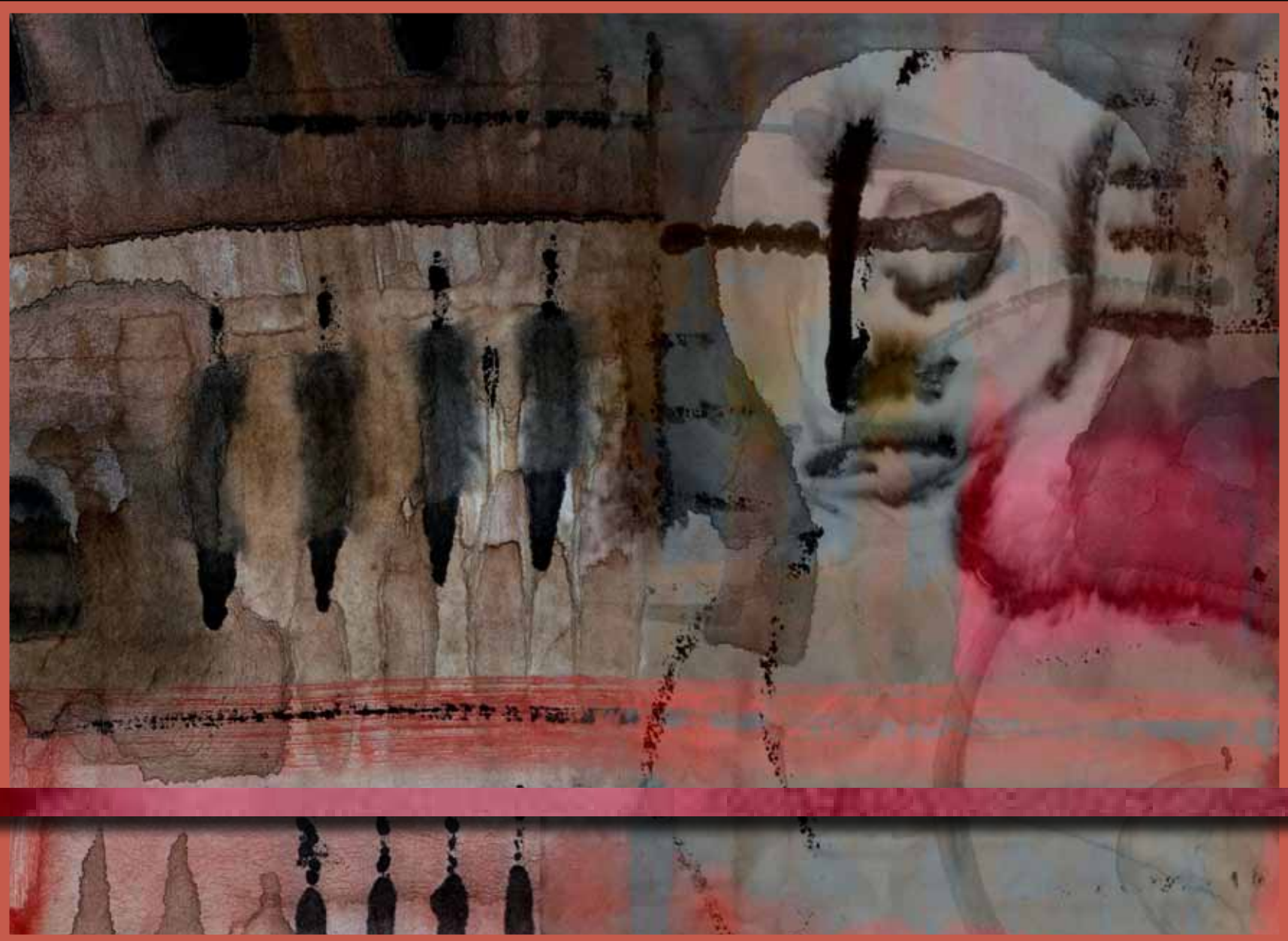
*It is foolish to tear one's hair in grief,
as though sorrow would be made less
with baldness.*

Cicero



As the blind,
lead the blind,
The grieving
follow the
grieving
Into the black
night and
morning light.





The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven a Hell, a hell of Heaven.

John Milton



We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring
will be to arrive
where we started

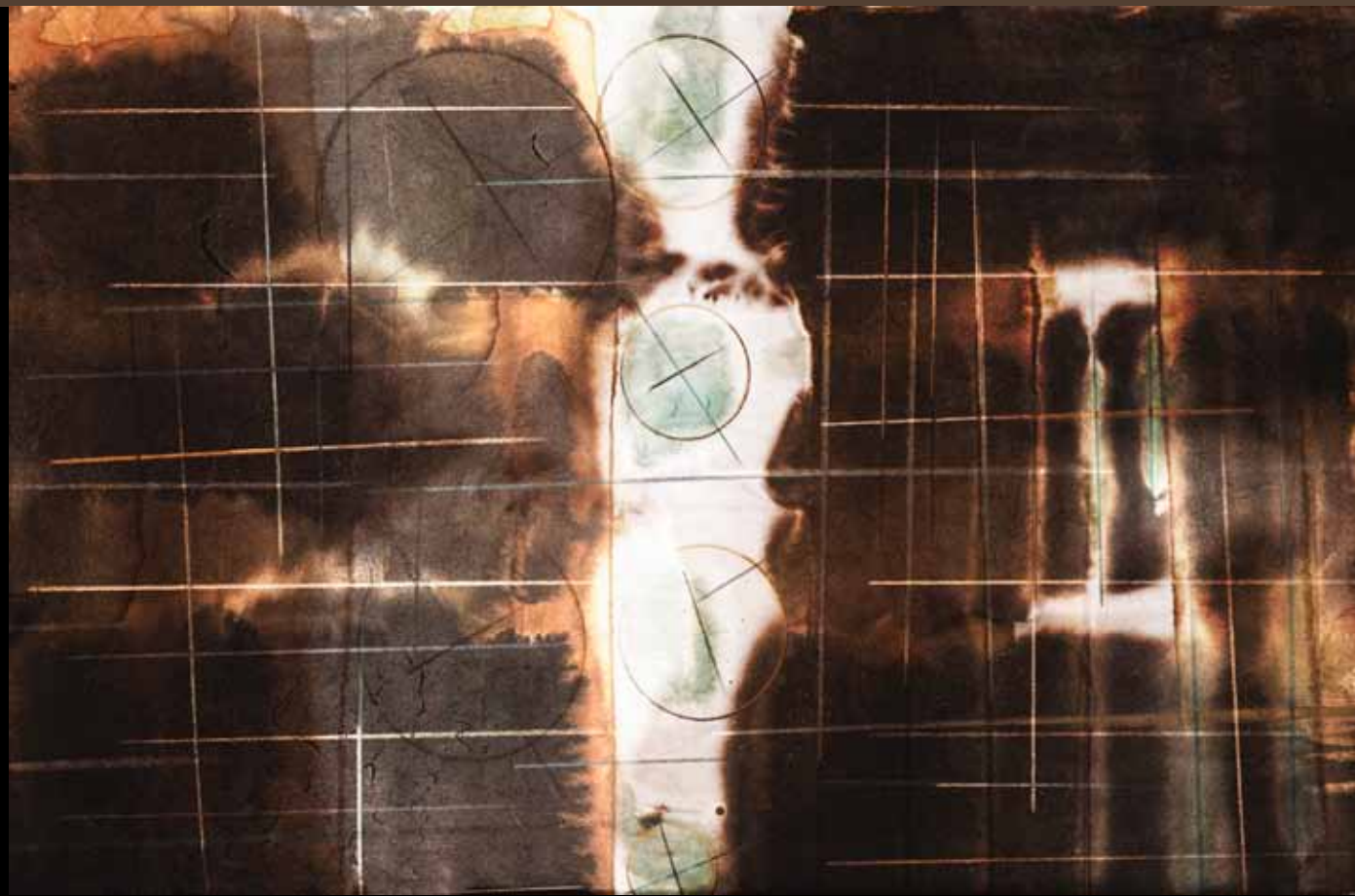


and know the place for
the first time.

T. S. Eliot

God should protect us from those things that we can learn to endure.

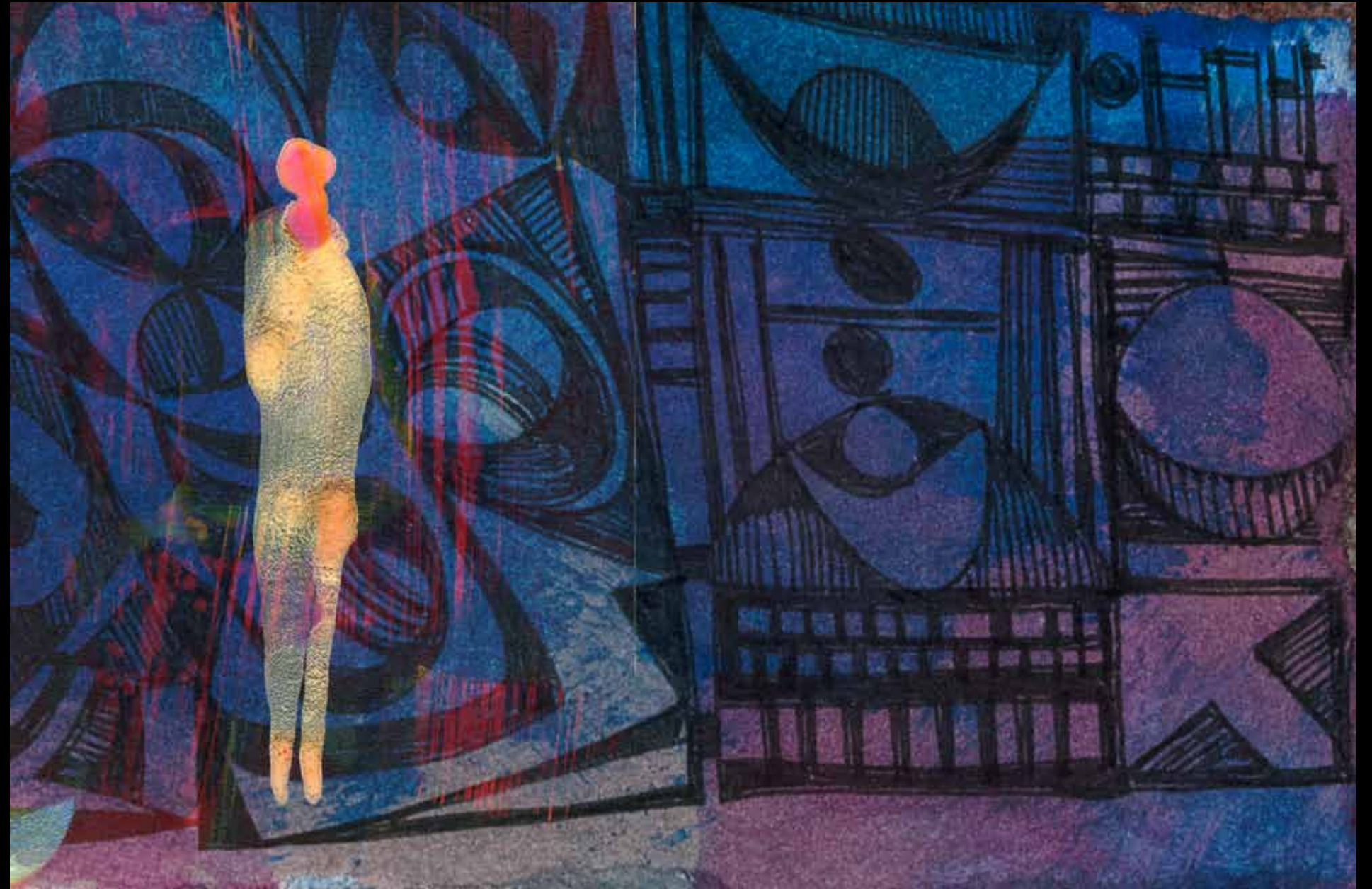
Yiddish Proverb

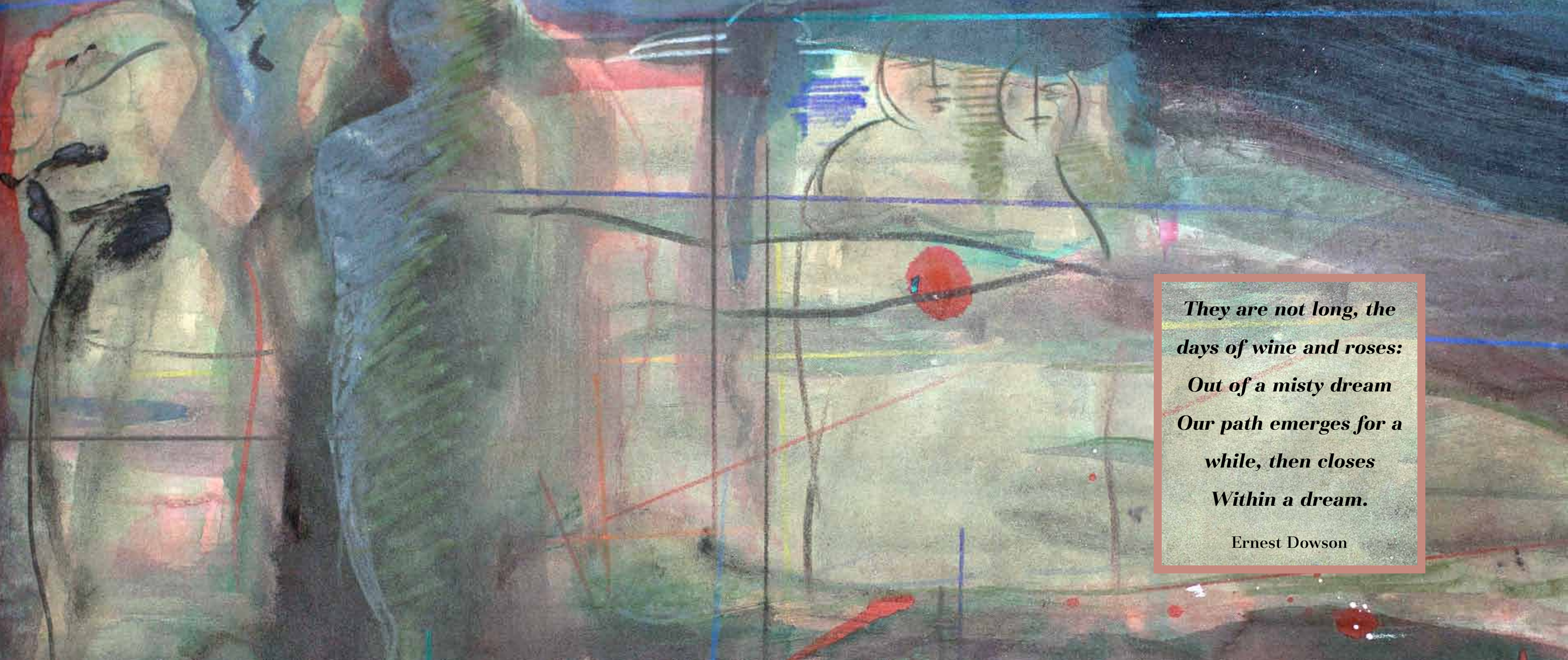




Since grief only aggravates your loss, grieve not for what is past.

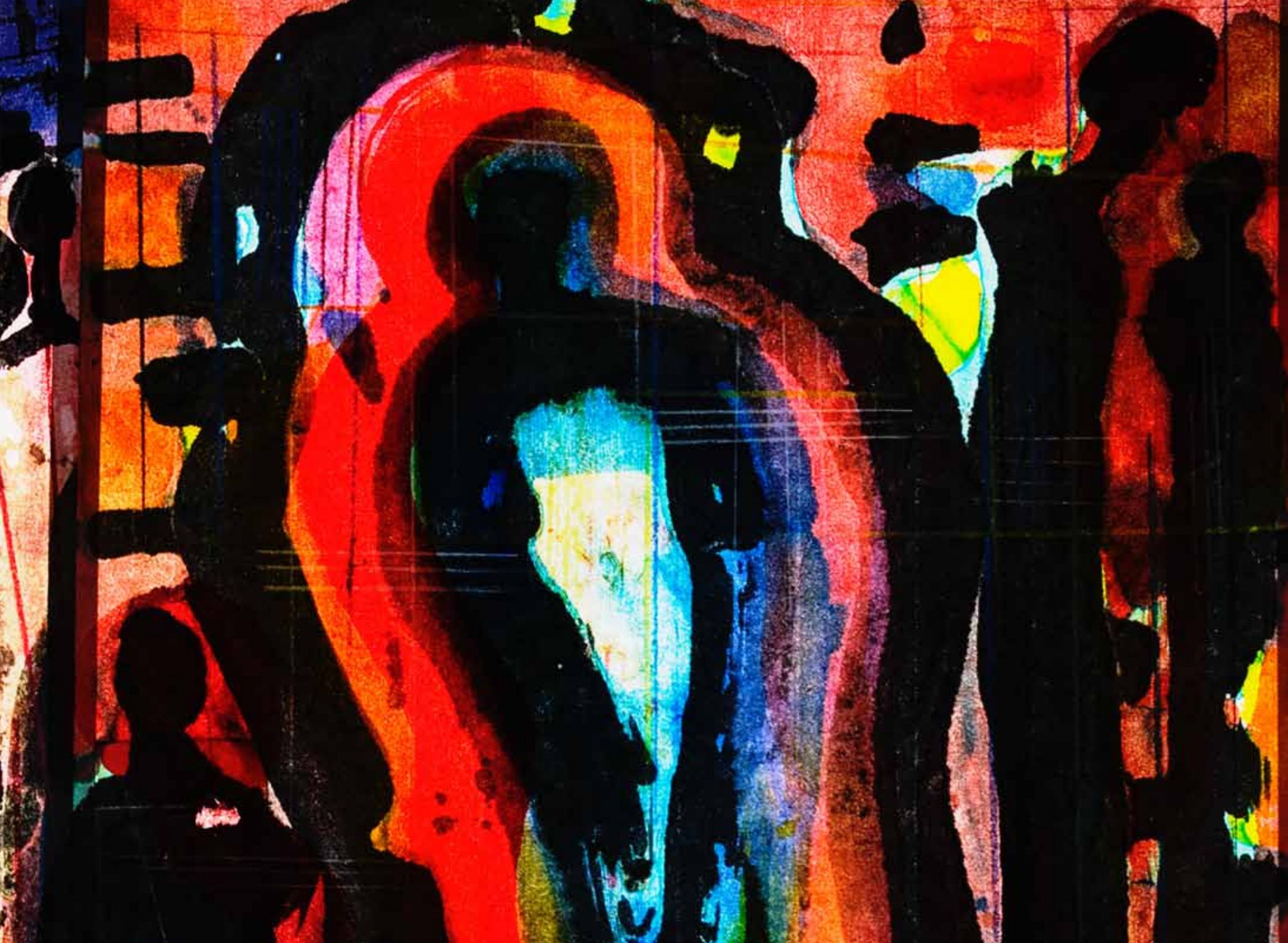
Walker Percy





*They are not long, the
days of wine and roses:
Out of a misty dream
Our path emerges for a
while, then closes
Within a dream.*

Ernest Dowson



Some men rage

at their fate

And what could

have been.

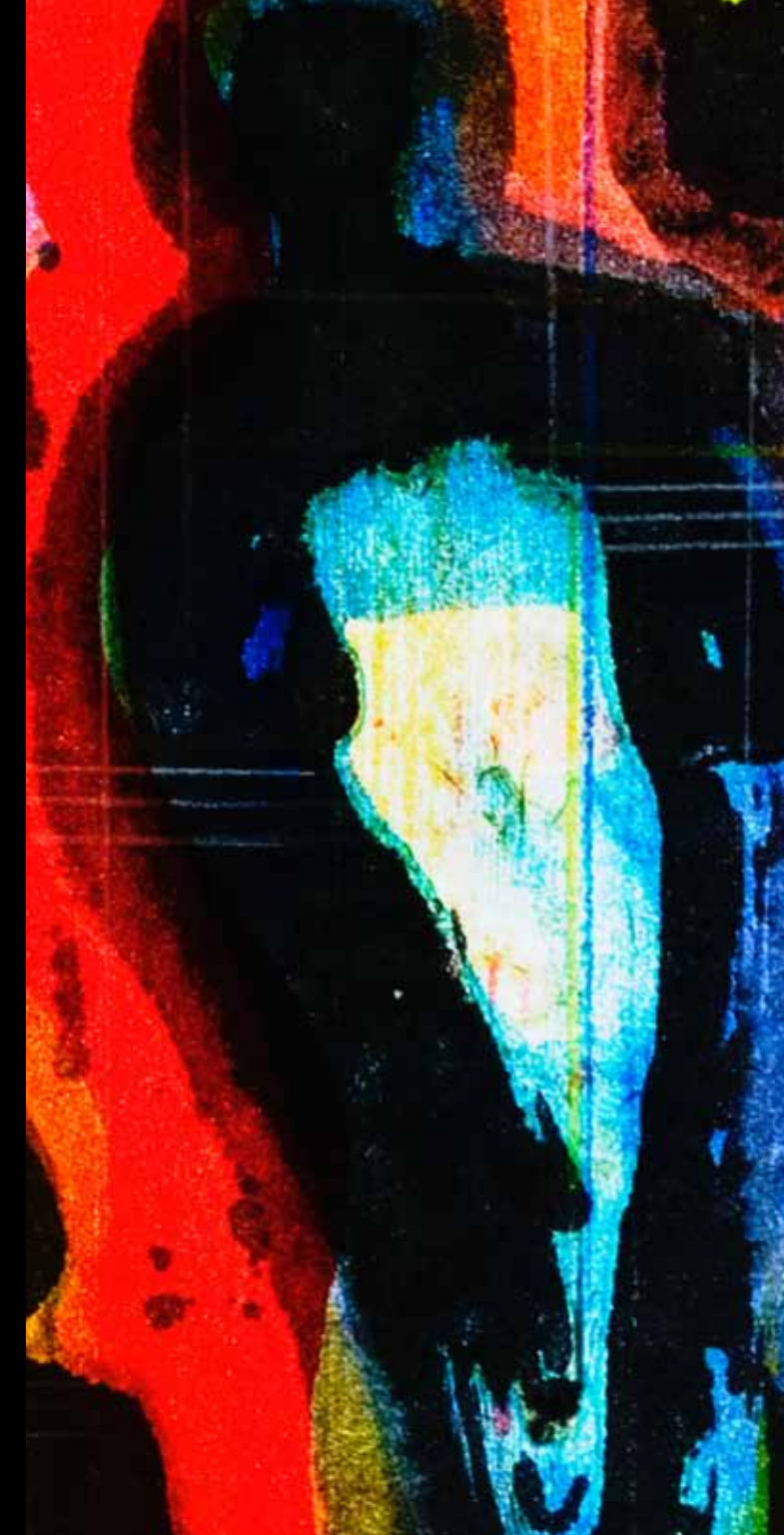
My journey

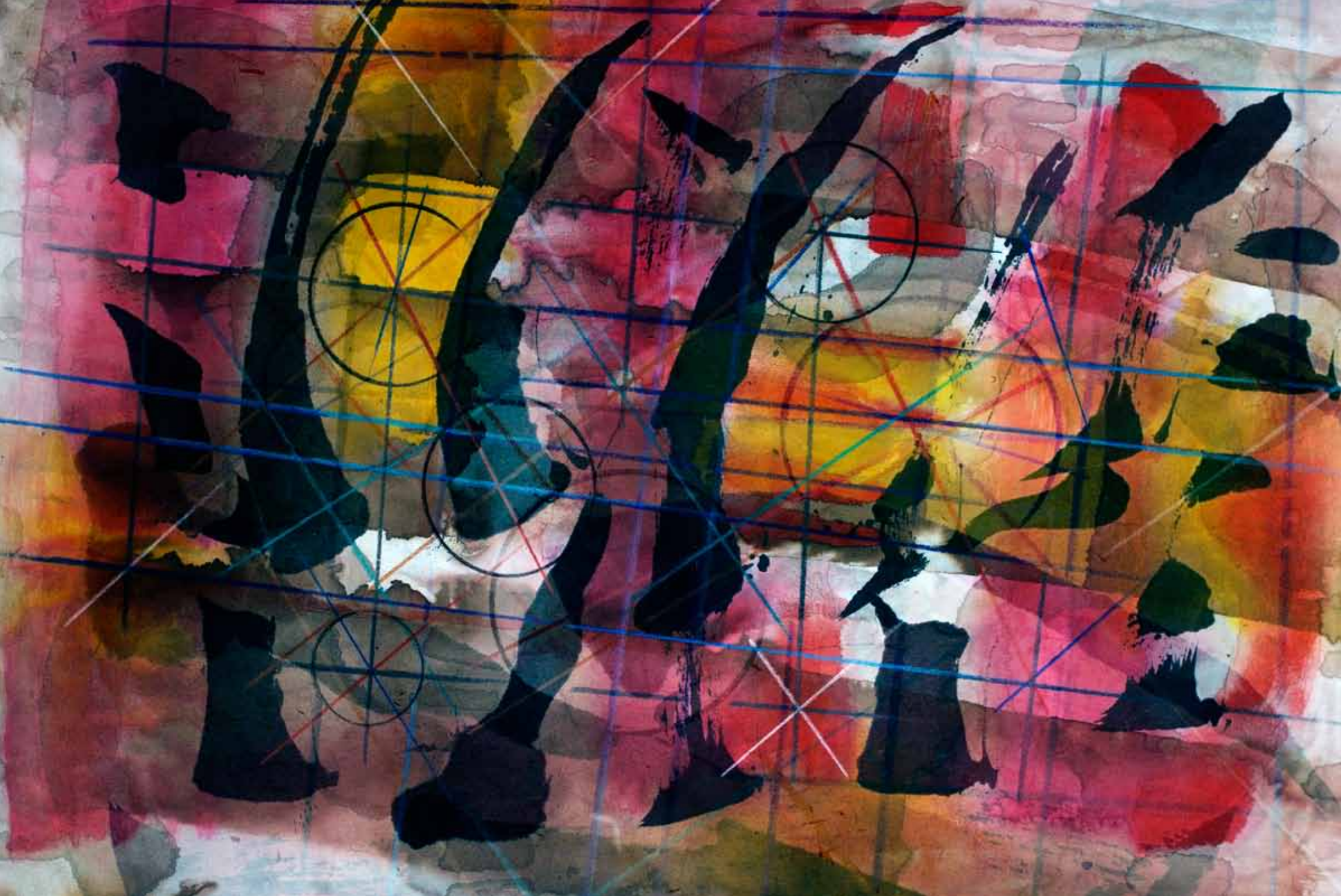
was a quiet

one—

Going deep

within.





Haiku:

*Our dreamless slumber
will outlast the stars and the
comet's fading tail.*

*Deep in the belly
of night stirs the embryo
of another day.*

*Each breath fingers an
abacus bead that counts out
our days in this world.*

*The sun is playing
a child's game of hide and seek –
I'm happy and sad.*

*The world was torn up
so I made collages from
mindless scattered scraps.*

*Each of our stories
is written on a small scrap
of windblown paper.*

*Words don't get lonely
ink doesn't suffer night sweats –
life is not haiku.*





In the end these things matter most:

How well did you love?

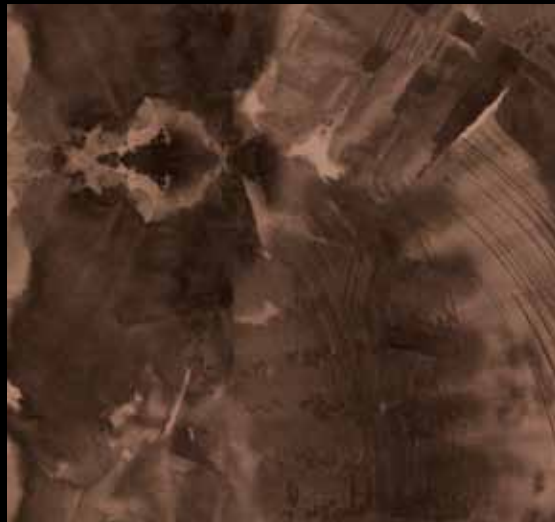
How fully did you live?

How deeply did you let go?

Siddhārtha Gautama



I am not enlightened —
but frightened of the world
and how it all will end.
I am not a doctor who can set
a broken bone to quickly mend.
I am not a lyricist whose rhymes
sing sweetly from the page.
I am not a sage spouting wisdom
and the pithy adage.
I am not a label or brand name—
but someone more anonymous
who knows not from where he came.



Fear murmurs in my left ear —
You are in immanent danger.
Angst whispers in my right ear —
You are alone and sinking.
A still small voice mumbles something
that I cannot quite hear...
but it fills my head with the fragrant smell
of flowering night jasmine from long ago.




The magic is that there is no magic:
The sun rises without an Aztec priest
ripping a living heart from a dying breast.
The sun sets without sacred chants or flicking a light switch.
The magic is that there is no magic:
Salmon return home to spawn in the rivers of their birth
and eagles swoop down and swipe a bewildered field mouse
without studying metaphysics or physics.
The magic is there is no magic:



Not in Jesus Christ's wrists,
Buddha's navel,
Krishna's flute,
Rabbi Akiba's beard,
or a Zen master's koan.
The magic is that there is no magic...
Just an eternal flow with no name.





Bob Barancik is an award-winning artist and video producer. His work has been exhibited at major American museums and international film festivals.

He and his wife, Amy Blake, are graduates of the Rhode Island School of Design. They maintain studios in St. Petersburg (Florida), Long Island (Maine), and Swarthmore (Pennsylvania).

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Contact Information:

Email: bobcreates@earthlink.net

Cell: 215.964-3937

Web: www.creativeshare.com

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