



TGHT RP

DIE KDK C NEE



Wilhelm Saayman
KING FOR A DAY

Works of art are often made out of other works of art: taking up, repeating, challenging or transforming prior works. This notion is referred to as 'intertextuality'. A work of art, or text, in other words, exists between and among other texts, through its relation to them.

Wilhelm Saayman unashamedly creates new 'texts' by referencing the style of such artists as Jean-Michel Basquiat, Albert Oehlen, Dana Schutz, and James Havard. He draws on documentary texts, or 'factual drawings', by Danzig Baldaev of the Gulag 'reformatory settlements' in the former USSR in the late 1940s and early 50s. Or he draws on the anime drawings of Yoshitomo Nara, or the pseudo-bourgeois drawings of Jockum Nordström. He integrates signs of the street in his art. He writes his own cryptic, graffiti-like texts on and in his paintings. (What, for example, does *Rdsd ssstnce*, or *Sm f t rbbd ff n me*, mean?). He is equally comfortable with the street culture magazine, *Juxtapoz*, as he is with the outsider art magazine, *Raw Vision*. His work is a verbal and visual amalgam, akin to the work of another artist to whom Saayman subscribes, namely Dash Snow. Words, signs, texts, all form part of Saayman's sardonic collage-like paintings. They are all bitter, mocking, and scornful in the basic shapes that portray the *outré* characters of his figures.

In the words of Jörg Immendorff, Saayman seems to be saying "Lower your standards, simplify, irritate all those who believe that artists have some special gift of imagination and creativity, or teach them a lesson along those lines. Stupid jokes could be involved, anything could be juxtaposed, meaningless sentences invented, any old stuff (or handling of it) would do, anything on the brink of the 'throwaway' or the 'wipeaway'. And if a painting was created or if some letters emerged amongst the smeared forms, then that is only meant to look meaningful, but certainly not to be meaningful."

Saayman seems to negate the importance of both the artist and the artwork. He celebrates, together with Roland Barthes, 'the death of the author' or of the artist. Barthes rejects the traditional view that the author is the origin of the text, the source of its meaning, and the only authority of its interpretation. His 'author' is stripped of all metaphysical status and reduced to a single location (or crossroad), where the language of art, that infinite storehouse of citation, repetition, echoes and references, crosses and re-crosses itself. The reader is thus, according to Barthes, free to enter the text from any direction. The reader is also free to take his pleasure of and from the text. Similarly, the viewer takes equal delight from looking at, or entering Saayman's paintings from north, south, etc.

In his texts the aim is to bring something unorthodox or perverse into connection with 'naked' language, or the painting technique of his texts. The pleasure of looking at his paintings resides in the measure of the unsettlement of our historical, cultural, and psychological assumptions. This inevitably brings a crisis to our relation with painting in general. His colours, for example, falls outside the register of the usual colour chart for commercial reproduction. His painting style can best be described as 'indisciplined', outside the confines of conventional painting norms and techniques, and seeping through the porous borders of 'disciplined' painting. He takes Albert Oehlen's 'acid colour test': "Discover the truth of the brushstroke. Let it shit all over you, find out what it feels from the inside".

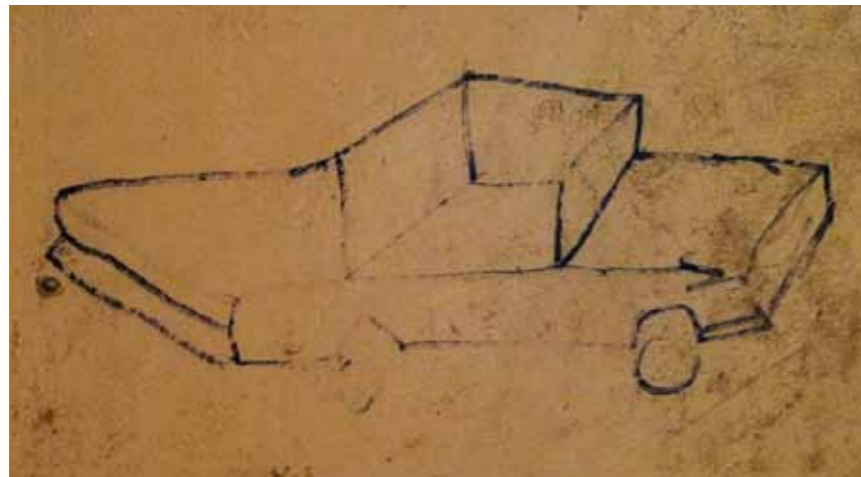
Since his paintings relate so strongly to other paintings, they are, at some level, about painting itself, signaling its *self-reflexivity*. Painting has variously been described over the past few decades as being 'dead' and, on the other side of the scale, as having 'triumphed' over death. Charles Saatchi organized a series of exhibitions, called *The Triumph of Painting* in 2005). It has received many doses of 'vitamins' in the process (Two seminal Phaidon publications are called *Vitamin P: New Perspectives in Painting*, 2002 and *Vitamin P2: More Perspectives in Painting*, 2011). Painting has been referred to as 'radical' and as 'stubborn', and lately, as 'provisional'. Wilhelm Saayman's work straddles all these qualifiers, and more. His paintings question both the contemporary world and the history of their own medium.

He writes incomplete texts to tease the reader/viewer. Vowels are often left out in the words and phrases. At other times vowels are randomly inserted to help along the helpless reader. More often than not, Saayman creates a disjuncture between the writing on the sheet of paper and the title of the word, which might be completely different to what one might have gathered from the inscription on the painting. So, for example, the random words, phrases, clauses and sentences such as *BNDT*, and *Can Adam still trust little evil?* and so on, bears the official title of *Cstl \$\$\$\$*. The words inscribed on another painting, *RND N M BRN*, has the title, *A knf, a frk, a bttl nd a crk*. Saayman's work thus becomes a veritable Dada-esque play with words and images.

Saayman sketches new texts to create a recursive framework of interpretation. He uses the image of a car, taken from a graffiti covered wall in an abandoned building in Johannesburg, repeatedly in his paintings. The stark outlines of the car are embellished with such random, cryptic words as 'root canal treatment', or 'immune booster', or 'hospice'.

Saayman conjures up sacred texts, layering the potential meaning of his work. He acknowledges the influence of African voodoo sculpture when explaining some of the zombie-like and monstrous figures in his paintings. "Sculpture is equal to a sacred text", he says. In the same manner as traditional African voodoo sculpture is embellished with rope, bones, body fluids, glass, beads, cowry shells, hair, feathers, wire, mirrors, molars and so on, Saayman imbues his paintings with a host of weird and uncanny creatures and objects.

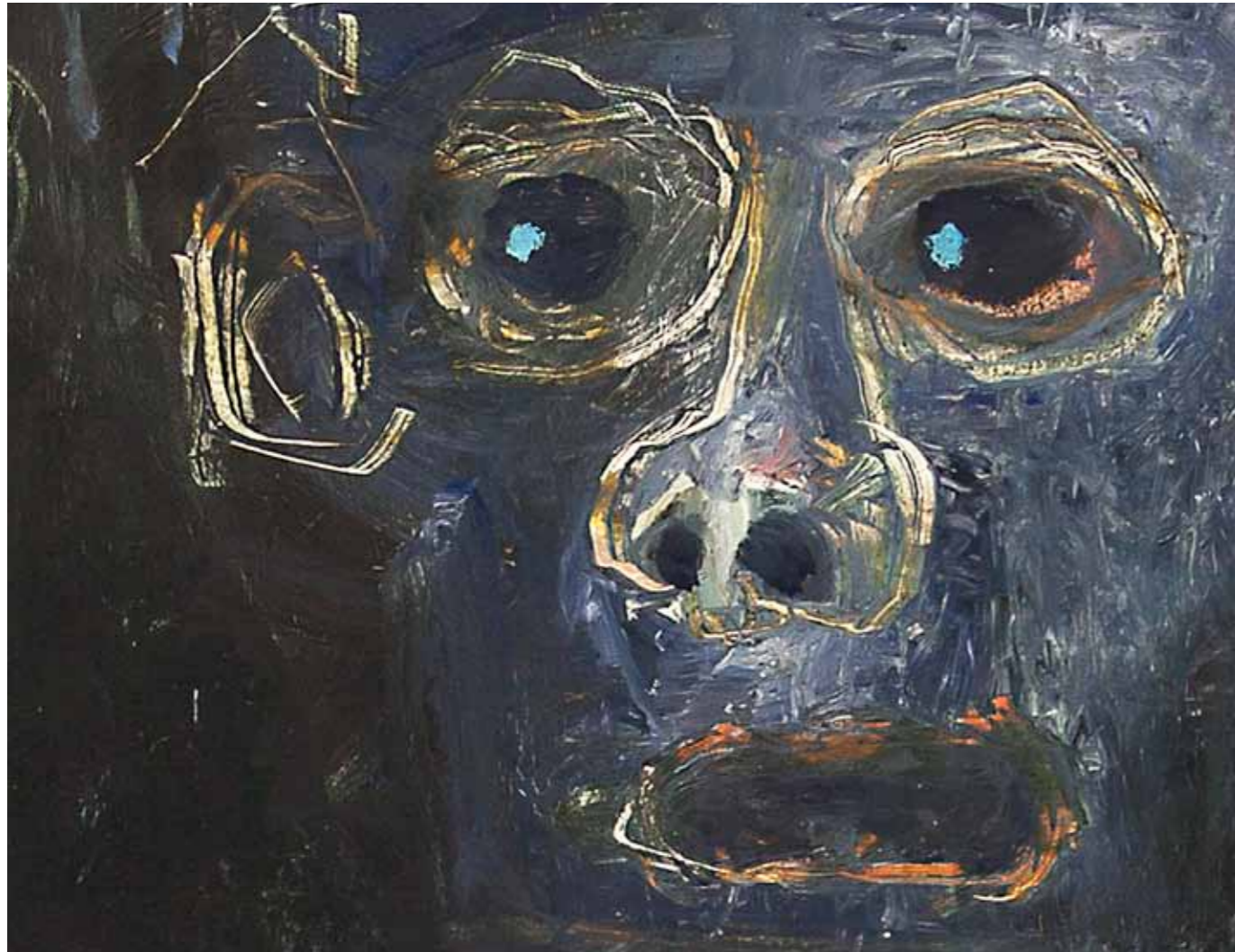
Sometimes he creates hierarchies in his work. Saayman draws on the Weblog of PK, comprising rare book illustrations, graphic art, illuminated manuscripts, lithographs and Renaissance prints, gathered from across "the dustier corners of the internet", retrieving these materials and referencing them in his work. His aim is to interrogate social stratifications, questioning the order of things that has been taken for granted. Saayman positions his work outside conventional structures. He is no ordinary structuralist, though. Instead, one can argue he that is a post-structuralist. If structuralism was heroic in its design to master the world of man-made signs and structures, post-structuralism is comic and anti-heroic in its refusal to take such claims seriously.



Graffiti in abandoned building, Johannesburg, 2011



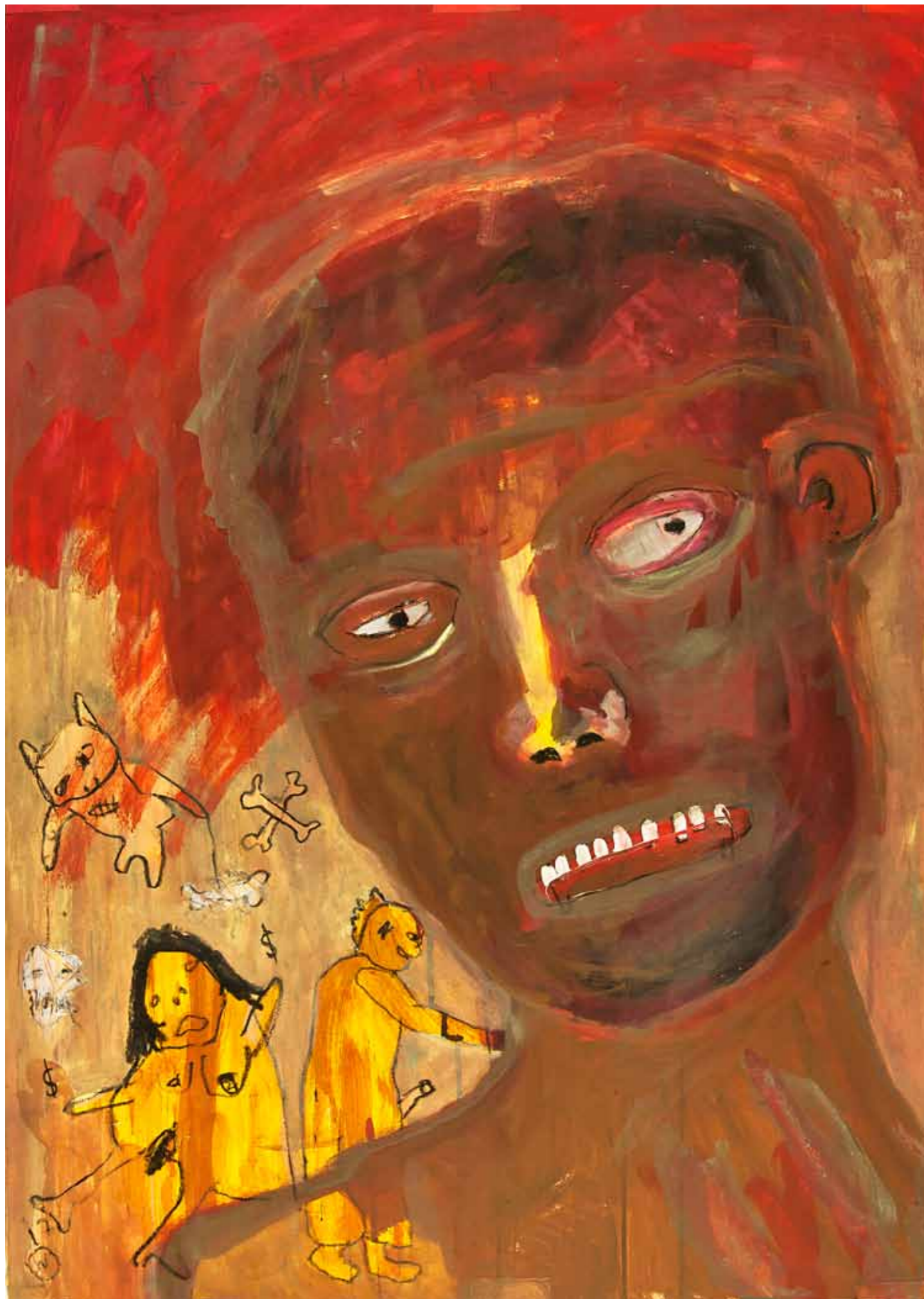
King Louis 2012 Oil paint, oil pastel on paper 1000X704mm



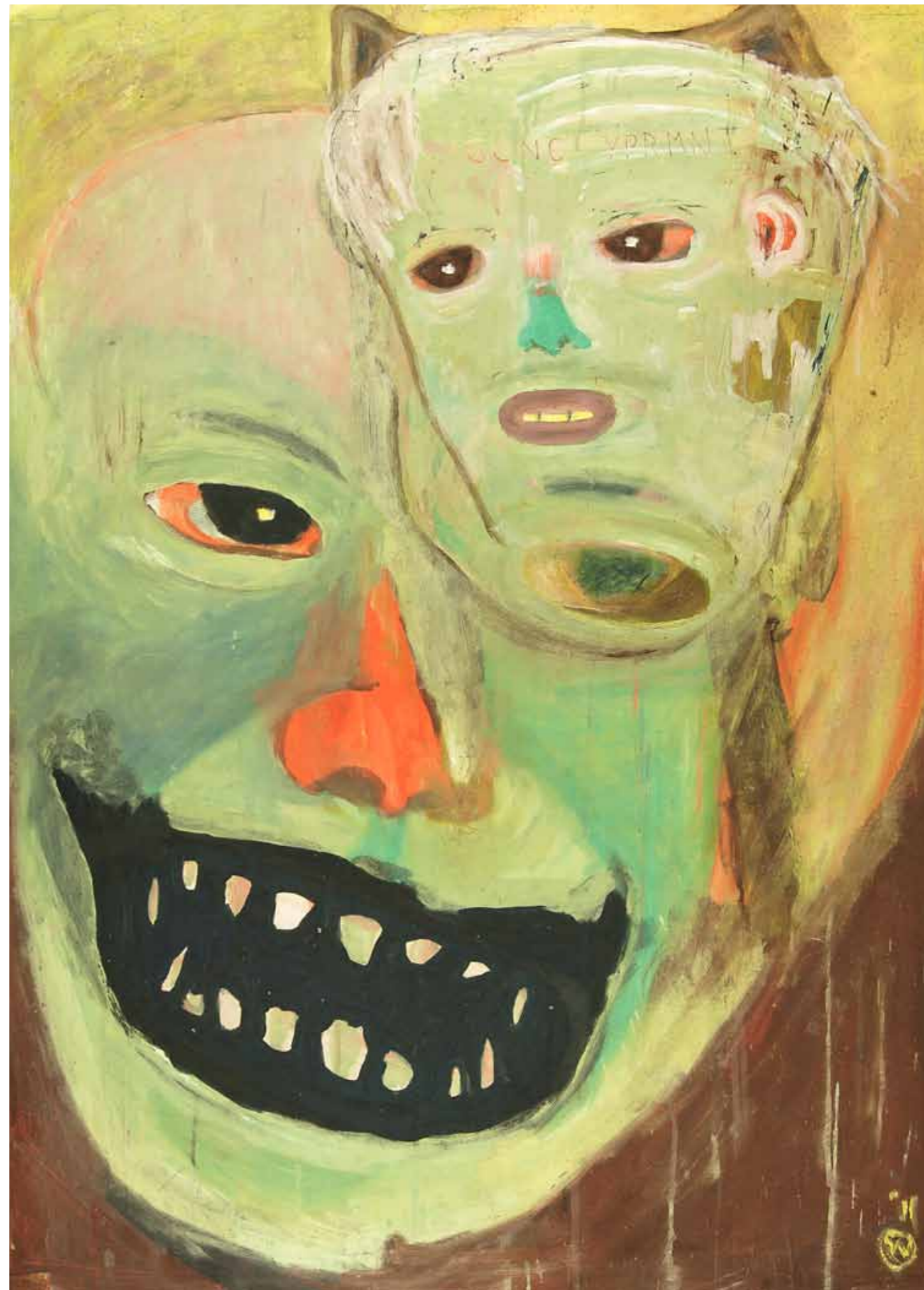
Die Krk s Nee 2011 | Oil paint, oil pastel on paper 1005X706mm



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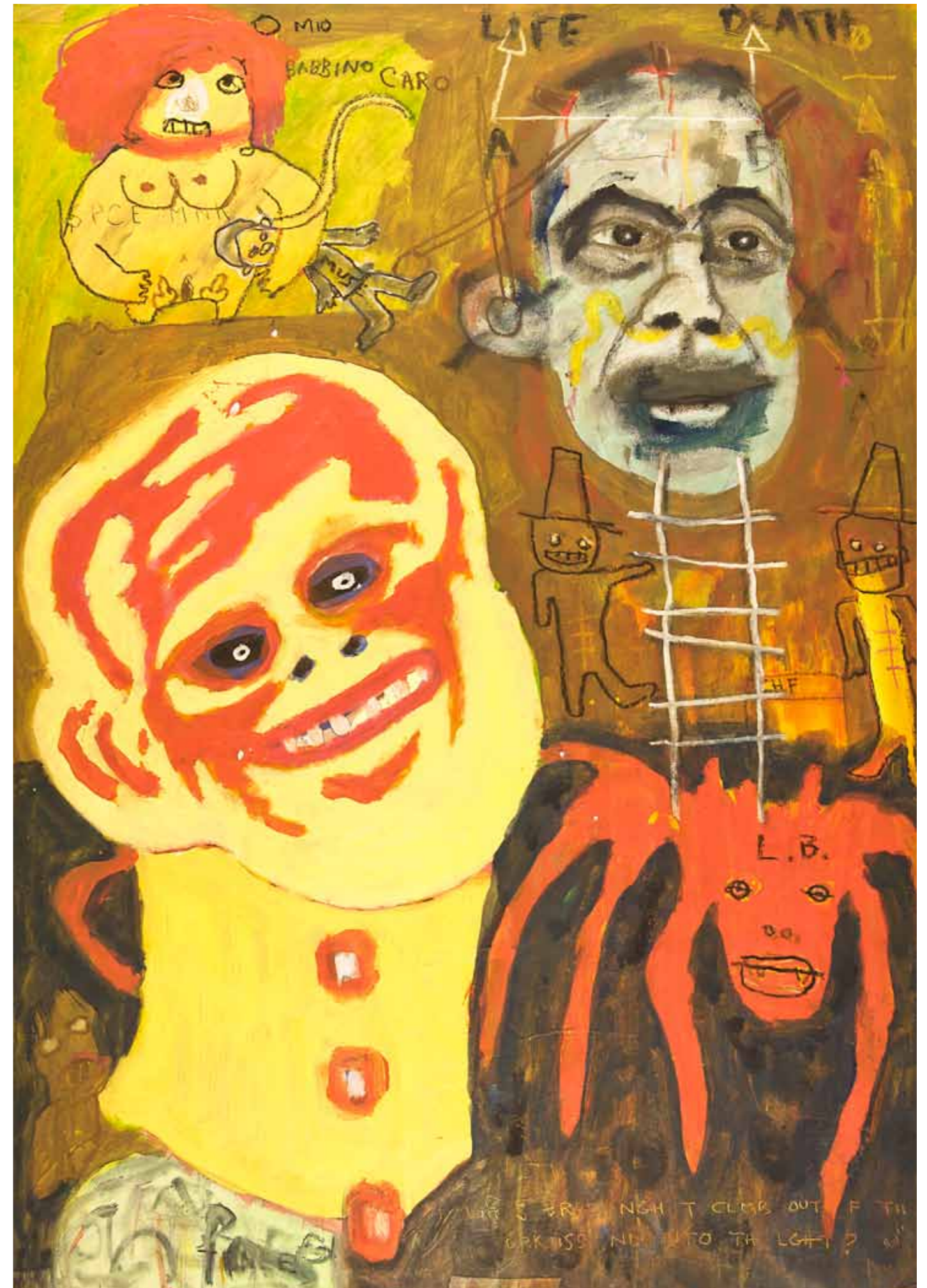
Scnc Xprmt 2011 Oil paint on paper 1000X707mm



Th Dd r Rstlss Tnt 2012 Oil paint on paper 1000X706mm



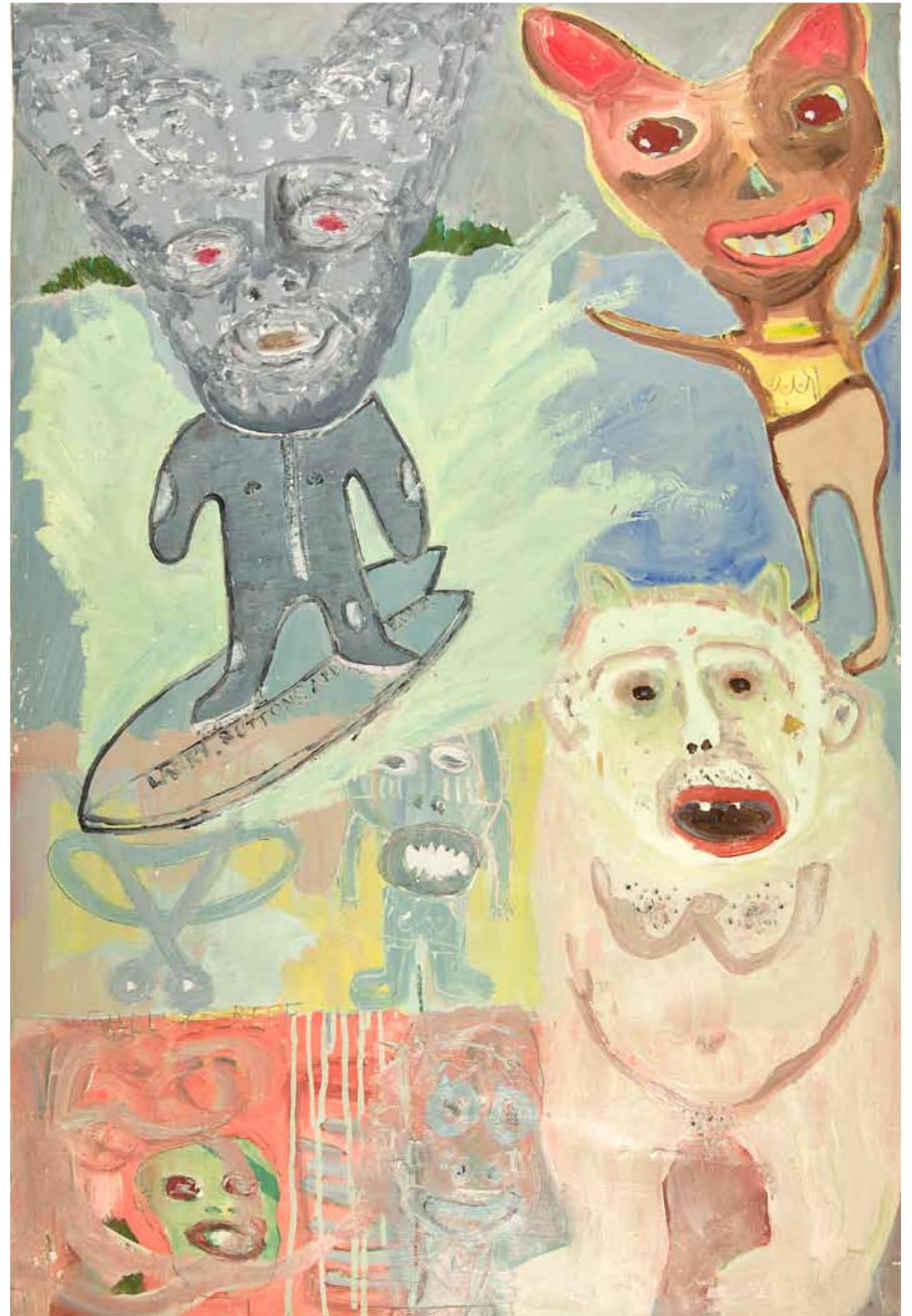
Hdhnr's t prty 2012 Oil paint, oil pastel on paper 997X705mm





Why always us Blues 2012 Oil paint on paper 707X1000mm







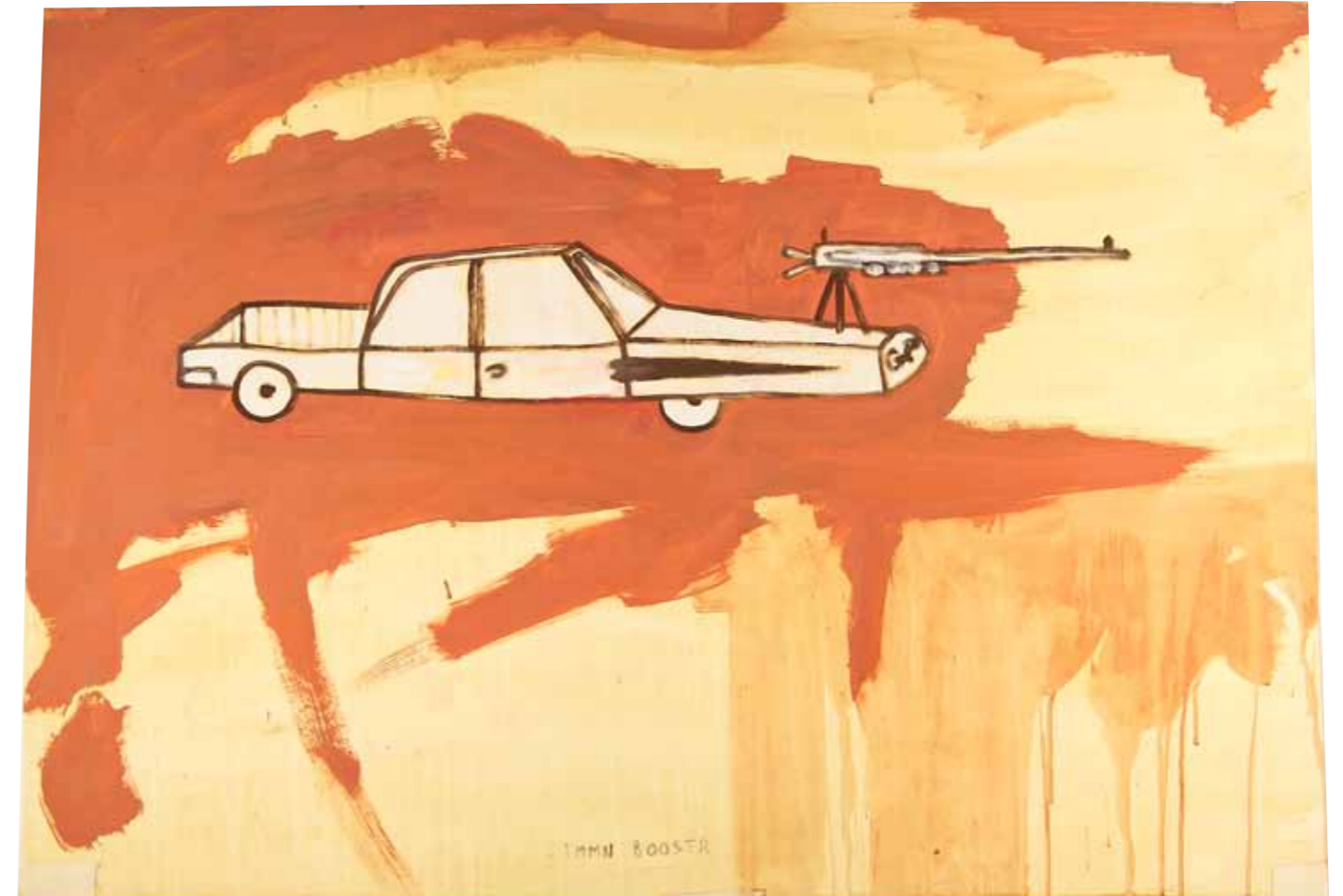


Plnttn Tms 2011 Oil paint on paper 1005X707mm





Hspce 2011 Oil paint on paper 704X1000mm



Imm Boost 2011 Oil paint on paper 707X1020mm







Vlcno 2011 Oil paint on paper 708X1000mm



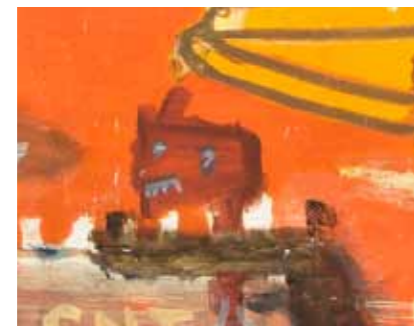
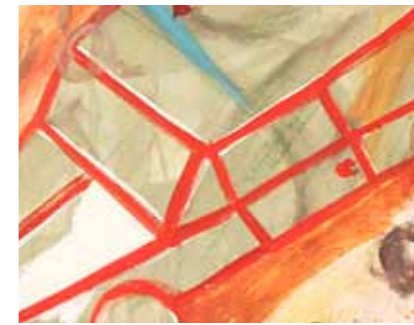
Slpstrm 2012 Oil paint on paper 707X998mm



Lst Rpbk 2011 Oil paint, oil pastel on paper 706X1004mm



Afrcn Pstrl 2011 Oil paint on paper 710X1002mm





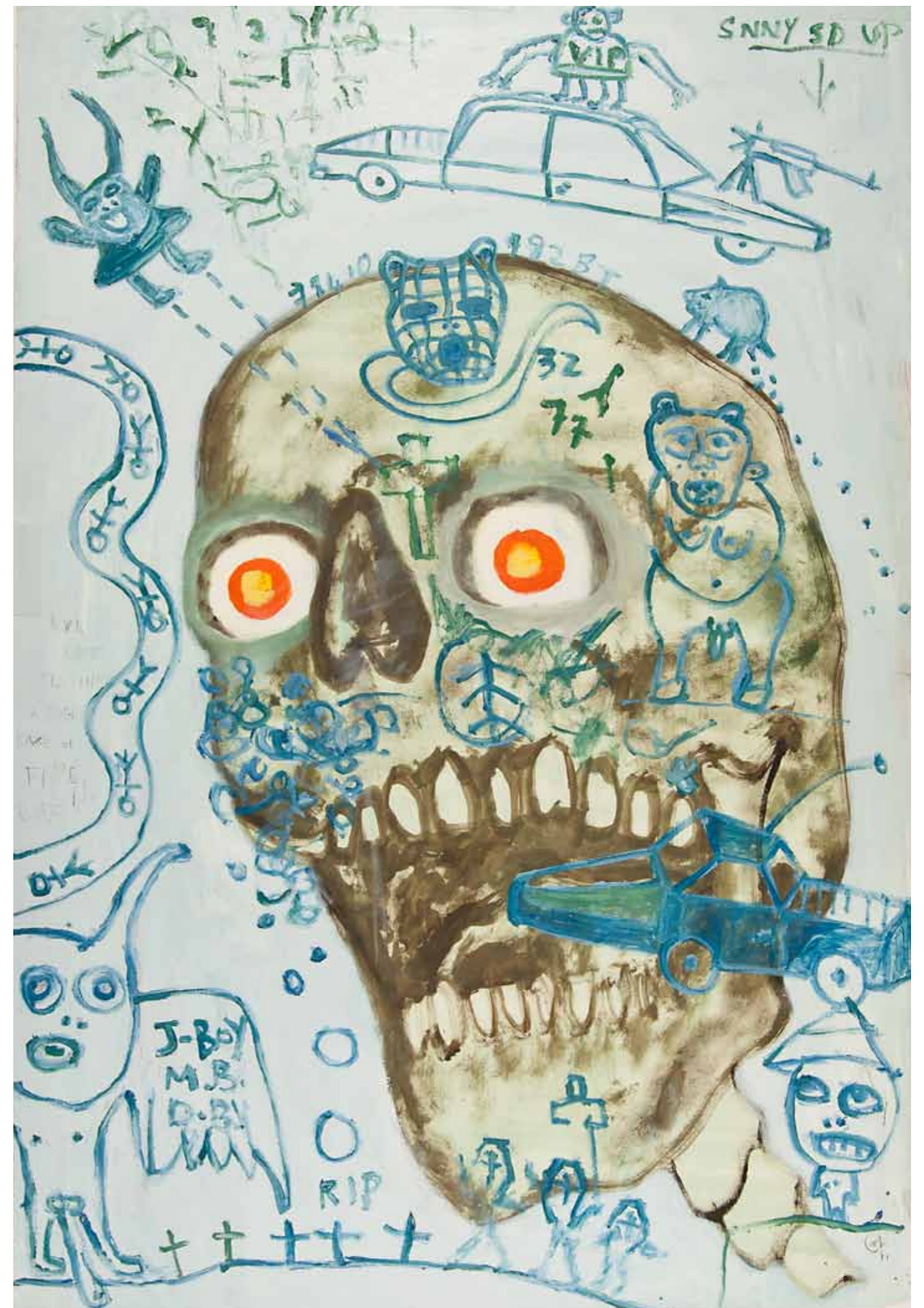
CASTLE 2012 Oil paint on paper 710X1000mm



Nw Wld Rcd 2012 Oil paint, oil pastel on paper 707X1000mm



RIP Mike Kelley 2012 Oil paint, pencil on paper 705X1000



Snry Sd Up 2011 Oil paint on paper 1040x714mm



Sleep now baby 2011 Oil paint on paper 710X1000mm

Wilhelm Saayman is a self-taught artist who has had three solo exhibitions in Johannesburg since 2007, the last one, titled *The Wrong Pills*, at GALLERY AOP November 2011. He also had a two person exhibition with Lizza Littlewort in Cape Town in 2008 and he participated in group shows in Johannesburg, chief of which was the seminal *Draw Links* exhibition at GALLERY AOP in October 2010. His work has been acquired by Iziko Gallery in Cape Town and by the Johannesburg Art Gallery. Saayman lives and works in Johannesburg.

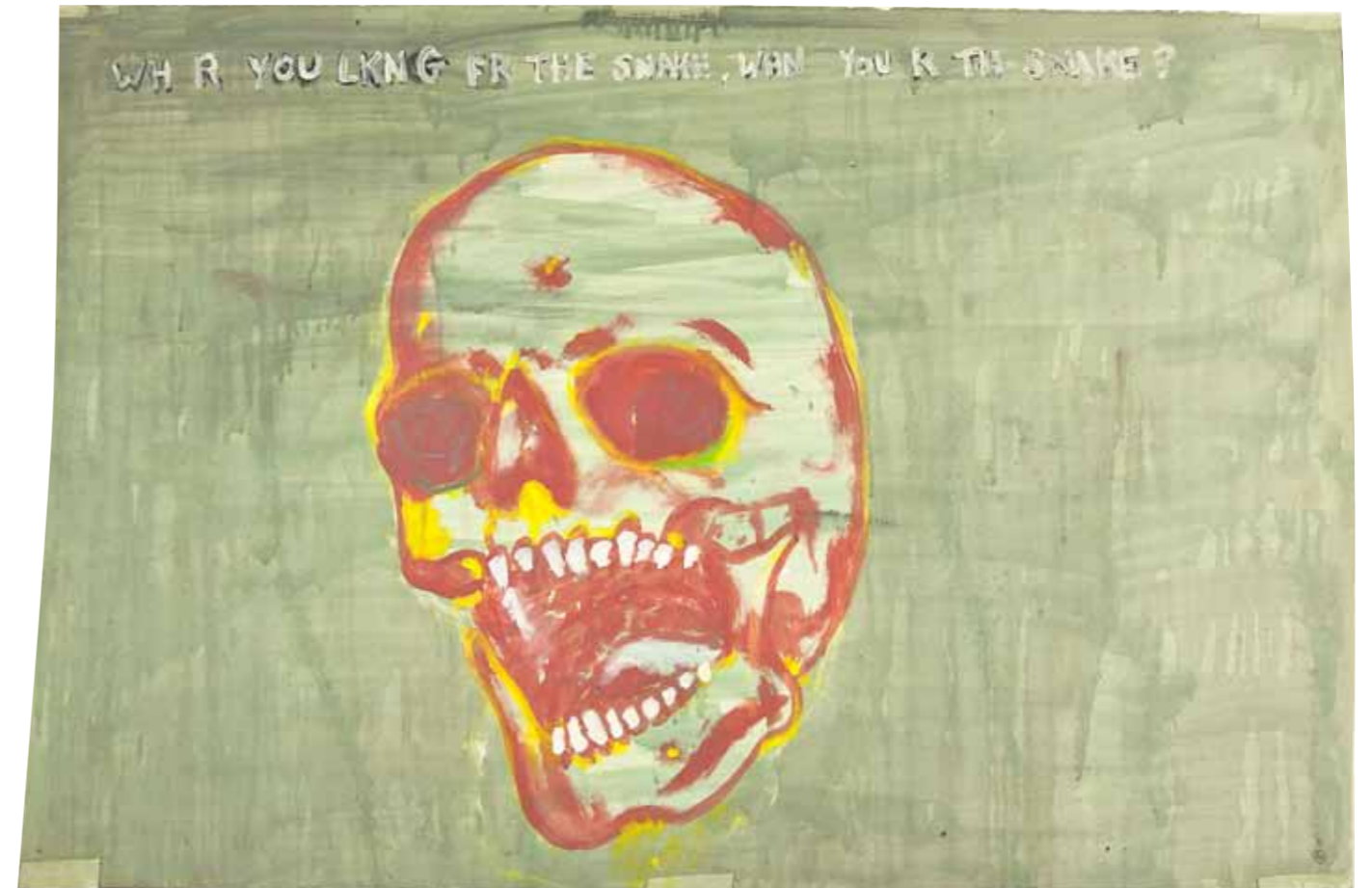
This catalogue accompanies *King for a Day*, a solo exhibition by Wilhelm Saayman at GALLERY AOP, Johannesburg (May/June, 2012)

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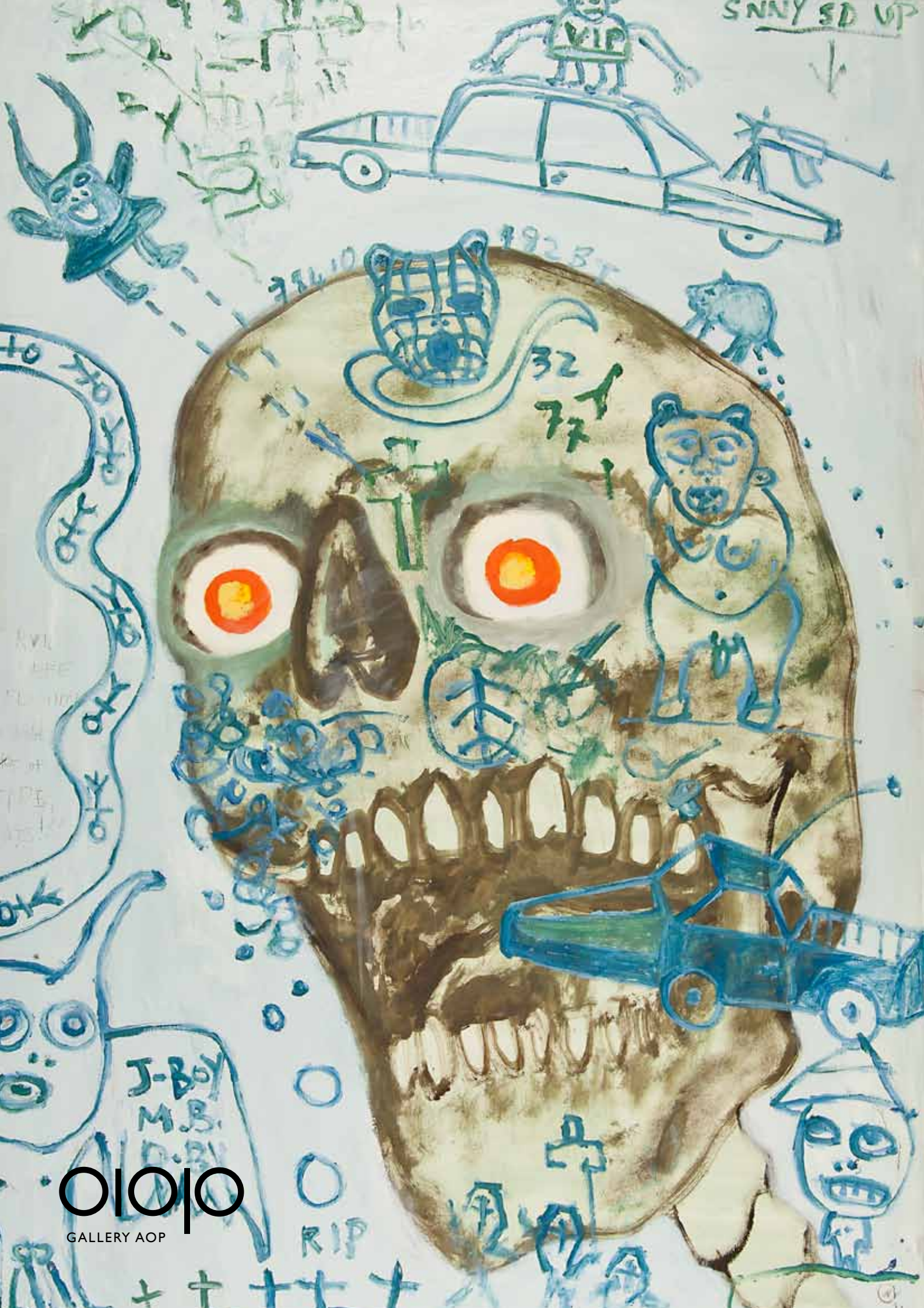
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Snk Riddle 2011 | Oil paint on paper 702X1061mm



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