

FRAMEWORK AND ARTISTS

ENG

KNIT TOGETHER  
IN  
REAPPROPRIATING THE APPROPRIATED  
ARMOUR

MAY 11 - JULY 1, 2023

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# INTRO

The year 2023 is a commemorative year in the Netherlands because 150 years ago Slavery was abolished in Suriname and the Caribbean parts of the Dutch Kingdom. In this context CBK Zuidoost initiated a collaboration with the Cultural Heritage Agency (RCE) to create the group exhibition *Knights in Shining Armour* (reappropriating the appropriated). The curator of this exhibition, Claudio Ritfeld, was inspired by the reappropriated definition of the word "Nigger", and the artistic/political intentions of Mark Steven Greenfield; reappropriate in order to neutralise the effects of racial stereotypes.

# CURATORIAL FRAMEWORK

Knights in Shining Armour shows an alternative approach on how to approximate historical objects and immaterial remnants stemming from our colonial past.

Black people thrive, celebrate and simply exist in their inexhaustible natural appeal, transcending all European beauty standards. Against all odds generations of Black Europeans have shown not to budge and continued keeping their backs and shoulders straight, and their chin up. Oftentimes Black communities in Europe consulted (inter) continental artists, writers and philosophers among others for guidance and support into a deeper understanding of the self for the sake of revaluation. In line with this the composition of contributors in this exhibition consists of mostly international artists: Joseph 'Joblek' Adebleku (GH), Kenneth Aidoo (NL), Ikechukwu 'Amos Black' Amos (NG), Ade Dare (NG), Giovanni Jona (SR), Madison Lewis (VS), Zella Vanie (VS/CI).

While the argument on “whether Blackface is actually racist or not” is gradually gaining ground in the Netherlands, fellow artists are reclaiming Black depictions as a means of empowerment by stealing the thunder of oppressing forces.

The hypothesis and rhetoric suggested by this exhibition is crystal clear; is there any room for a sense of humour, satire, or comedy in the context of (institutional) racism and the monumental tools of oppression? Even though Ritfeld presents this research question as a rhetorical one, many would argue there is no room for such an approach when dealing with these hefty subjects. What happens when we rephrase the question by adding “in art”; is there any room for a sense of humour, satire, or comedy in the context of (institutional) racism and the monumental tools of oppression in art?

A magical playing field unfolds in front of us when dealing with contemporary art in

relation to historical facts and objects. There's an even more mystical power implicated when we use laughter as healing

**// In terms of linguistic theory, reappropriation can be seen as a specific case of a type of semantic change, namely, of amelioration - a process through which a word's meaning becomes more positive over time. //**

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aid for otherwise incurable "diseases". Alongside the theory of Greenfield, Knights in Shining Armour is also deeply inspired by the historical journey and linguistic transformation of the word "Nigger". The curator attempts to draw a parallel between this phenomenon and the act of contemporary artists reappropriating black stereotypes in figurative painting. In this regard the curator is interested in how

humour can function as the ultimate “Armour” deflecting or even neutralising the weapons of racism and oppression.

There are many different stages and forms in the process of emancipation. The wounds of our colonial past are more felt by some than others, and along the way Black culture and Black identity has shown us its resilience using various strategies. This exhibition introduces another strategy in reference, one used by Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR) therapists. Here it applies to the viewer’s gaze on figurative paintings accentuating or even exaggerating facial features and dark-skin complexion. EMDR is a therapeutic treatment method that is mainly used for people with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). An essential element in this exhibition is the burdening of the “working memory”. While viewers gaze at the paintings, the portrayed characters may remind them of a traumatic racist experience. This working memory load is achieved,

among other things, by eye movements. As the viewer strolls from painting to painting, and heritage object to heritage object, the immersive installation plays the actual percussive score of an altered EMDR therapy session. This treatment method is often used to restart the stalled processing of traumatic experiences, like a veteran in need of psychotherapy after coming home from an extremely violent battle.



# MADISON LEWIS

Madison Lewis lives and works in New York. Her artistic practice consists of using Black radical theory as a framework to create paintings and drawings. She is primarily concerned with race in the digital frontier, the violence of imperial Christianity, and Black Americans' relationship to the American landscape. She holds a BFA in Painting and Drawing from Purchase College.

# TOM'S EXECUTION



2020

OIL ON CANVAS 101,6CM X 101,6CM

Using Betye Saar's artwork, Liberation of Aunt Jemima, as a framework, Tom's Execution is an attempt to subvert the mammy caricature that's depicted in the television show Tom and Jerry. The mammy caricature is appropriated and transformed into a subversive, non-subservient figure wielding a handgun. Tom, the cat, becomes a symbol of white supremacy that the now revolutionised mammy figure eradicates.

# CANAAN'S FRUIT



2021

OIL ON CANVAS 50,8CM X 50,8CM

Two black hands with rainbow-painted nails are held up to frame a white plantation house in the distance. In *Canaan's Fruit*, the Biblical story of the Israelites and their journey to Canaan is correlated to the journey on the transatlantic slave trade. Through imperial Christianity and its reinforced ideals, the white plantation house transforms into a "promised land" for Black people that is barren, desolate, and where Christian notions about sexuality become a trap.

# UNTITLED



2019

OIL AND FOUND OBJECT ON CANVAS 60,69CM X 76,20CM

Untitled depicts a Black angel wearing a white mask holding an ornate gold cross against a blue and orange sky. The angel and the cross become an emblem of the White supremacist notions that are steeped within

the foundations of White Christianity. These White supremacist notions end up bolstered within the Black Christian church, which has its foundations within and have adopted principles of White imperial Christianity, resulting in colonialism and slavery.

## **ZELLA VANIÉ**

**Zella Vanié is a multidisciplinary artist and writer based in New York City. They earned an MFA from the School of Visual Arts, and have taught at New York University and California College of the Arts. They served in the US Army as a satellite operator with deployments to Iraq and Haiti; and they are a founding board member of the Black Veterans Project.**

# SWEET SURRENDER I



2022

GOUACHE ON CANVAS 177,80CM X 213,36CM

This larger than life work reimagines the classic Saint Sebastian (the patron saint of archers) motif through a Black queer lens. The painting features a subject stoically accepting an arrow, symbolising love and betrayal.

The steel knight helmet on the exposed figure embodies strength and vulnerability. Unfolding in a dream-like world devoid of death but not absolved of suffering, the inclusion of fangs reclaims the darkness demonised by colonialist forces, compelling viewers to embrace the beauty of surrender.



# LEAN QUEEN



2022

GOUACHE ON CANVAS 91,44CM X 121,92CM

Lean Queen draws upon the opulence of European royalty and the intricate subculture surrounding codeine and promethazine

consumption in the American South, interweaving visual elements and references to create a compelling and thought-provoking exploration of the complexities of the Black experience. This work aims to challenge conventional notions of power and societal structures by featuring a Black royal figure that defies Eurocentric depictions of nobility. It invites viewers to contemplate the resilience and strength of marginalised individuals who have transformed pain into influence within the realm of pop culture.

# **ADE DARE**

**Ade Dare's informal training in painting was undertaken in the studios of veteran Ibadan - Nigeria modern artists - Tope Fatumbi and Taiwo Fadare. Through literature he was exposed not only to the techniques of painting but, more importantly, to Yoruba traditional cultures, beliefs, and literature.**

**Primarily using oil and acrylic paints from the very beginning, Ade Dare's work especially the colours, symbols, and narratives he uses are allusions to Yoruba beliefs and traditions. The literature he consulted in search for a greater understanding of Yoruba culture led him to Ifa. Ifa is an ancient form of philosophy, divination and science.**

# CONTEMPLATING OYA

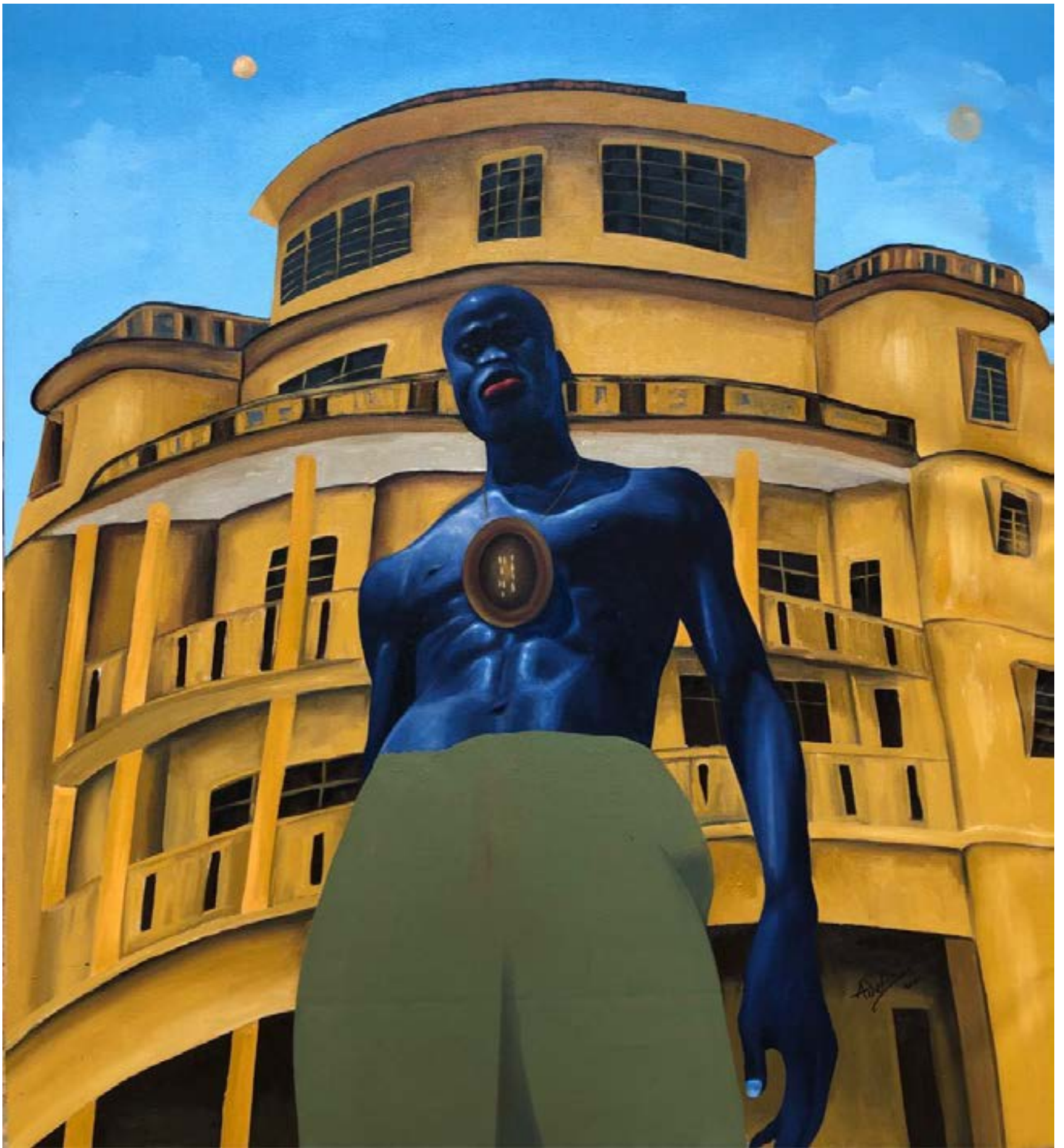


2022

ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 152,40CM X 106,68CM

Oya is a deity (Orisha) of Yoruba pantheon. She is in charge of weather, death and rebirth. In her chronicles, she suffered from still-birth, unable to further her genealogy. This piece expresses her moment of contemplation, her journey within. Contemplating Oya is a metaphor to address the Black race to contemplate on her journey, her genealogy; to see how altered and influenced it has been; to look for answers within, for what shall be of the morrow.

## TWICE AS TALL (ONILEGOGORO II)



2021

OIL ON CANVAS 121,92CM X 152,40CM

**“Twice as tall we stand, wanting nothing that we are not. Needing everything that we are, originally.”**

Influenced by Burna Boy's fifth studio album Twice as Tall, this piece sought to establish

the original state of the stereotyped and self-stereotyped African race. To alleviate and eventually eradicate how mentally self-subjecting Africans living on the continent are, this piece sought to reflect what the original state of mind of Africans should be. How much misconception of self-identity, perhaps ignorance of self-identity, Africans have been through should have reached a threshold of diminishing return.

# **JOBLEK**

**Joseph Adibleku, popularly known as Joblek is a contemporary Ghanaian artist, born in Accra, in 1985. He has been painting for the past twenty years.**

**At a tender age of 6, Adibleku developed an early interest in art. He enrolled at the Ankle College of art and design in early 2000 and graduated with a degree in art after a three-year course. Areas of study included graphic design, textile design and painting. He challenged and stretched himself through these years of education.**

**Adibleku appreciates the diversity of culture he grew up in as a Ghanaian which helped shape and influence his thought on the subject matter as a figurative artist.**

## PORTRAIT OF VIRGIL ABLOH



2019

ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 121,92CM X 152,40CM

The architect and fashion designer Virgil Abloh noted that one of his principles is that a new design can be created by changing an original by only three percent. He described



his approach as being “ironic detachment” and that Marcel Duchamp’s precedent “gives him the grounds to copy and paste, to take and to re-apply”. This philosophy caused Abloh to be accused of plagiarism and appropriation. Nonetheless, Abloh was listed as one of Time magazine’s 100 most influential people in the world in 2018. In December 2018, Abloh was honoured as a leading innovator by Ebony Power 100. Abloh was also nominated for 2019 Menswear Designer of the Year.

# SELF MOTIVATED



2023

ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 152,40CM X 190,50CM

Neither the artist nor the curator have any comments to support this arrogant figure.

# AMOS BLACK

Ikechukwu A. Christian was born in 1997 in Lagos, Nigeria. Based in Ikorodu Lagos Christian started his professional career in 2018, whilst studying at Yaba tech Lagos, Nigeria.

Christian loved to experiment with any kind of material to create beauty out of nature.

Already at age 12 he learned about the techniques encompassing his craft during his studies in art school. This helped build his career. Christian discovered his talent in primary school, where he found himself drawing the "brick seven head" (a Nigerian style of drawing) on his maths note, so then he decided to get a special note for drawing. This was the moment when he fell in love with art. Christian intends to show the importance of life and how this is represented through every individual, - how important moments in life are magnified by the way we treat other human beings, and how this involves lives of the African race.

# THE ROYALTY



2022

OIL, PAPER AND ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 130CM X 177CM

"This work is the story of my background."

I came from a royal family without me knowing, only after 26 years of age. My father was a prince of a kingdom in an Igbo land somewhere in Ebonyi Abakaliki - Nigeria. My father left the house at the age of fifteen in search of his own daily bread and livelihood in Lagos - Nigeria. He never went back to his hometown or visited his father who was the king. His mother died during childlabour but he survived. November 14, 2016 at 09:14 PM I lost my dad to a stroke but while he was alive he never mentioned to me that he was the only son who came from a royal family. After his death, with the help from some villagers who knew him and took me to his hometown, I was brought to my grandfather. Here I found out my father was the only son of his father, and even my grandfather too was the only son of his father. This inspired me to make "The Royalty"

**Amos Black**

# **GIOVANNI JONA**

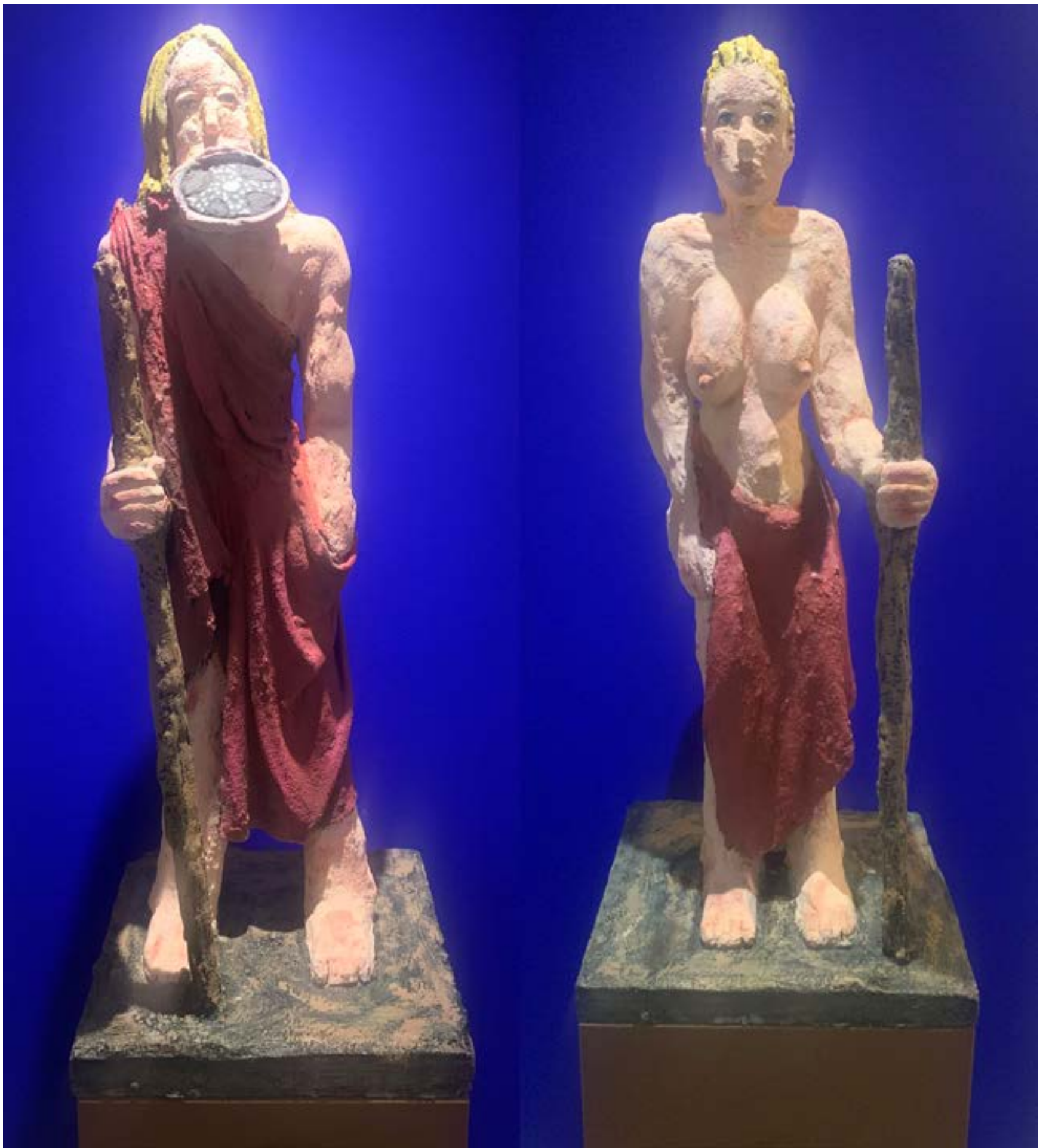
**Giovanni Jona was born in Marowijne, a district in the northeast of Suriname, South America. He currently lives and works in Paramaribo. During the outbreak of the Surinamese guerrilla war in 1986, he fled to Paramaribo with his family.**

**As a child, Jona loved to read comics and then draw the characters of the story (e.g. Batman and Superman). At the age of 12 he participated in a drawing competition of the Surinamese Rotary Club and came second.**

**After graduating from primary school, he began technical training, but unfortunately did not complete it.**

**At the age of 16 he worked in a gold mine. Physically it was much too hard work for Jona. Longing for drawing and painting, he auditioned at the famous Nola Hatterman Academy. Jona graduated there in 2016, specialising in portrait painting.**

## SUMA NA YU?



2023

CEMENT, ACRYLIC, GRAVEL, SAND, WIRE 36CM X 100CM X 36CM

Giovanni Jona's work (title unknown) touches the core of this exhibition. Jona showcases the subversion that accompanies the act of reclaiming. His work is a response to the 2 metres high Torchères, the heritage objects on the other side of these columns. This work is focused on

the European historical hyper-obsession with the Black body, and refers to the perverse story of Saartjie Baartman - a South African enslaved who became famous as a human attraction because of her behind. The male figure of this diptych is based on a comparable hyper-obsession in which cultural appreciation by an "outsider" manifests itself in the appropriation of other people's cultural practices. This man figure refers to the Surma - the East African people with a tradition among Surma women to make dilations in the lower lip by placing a plate. Jona has deliberately chosen to execute this work in a spatial way, in contrast to his mainly two-dimensional paintings. According to Jona, the three-dimensionality and weight of the material reflect the heaviness, multivocality and complexity of the subject.

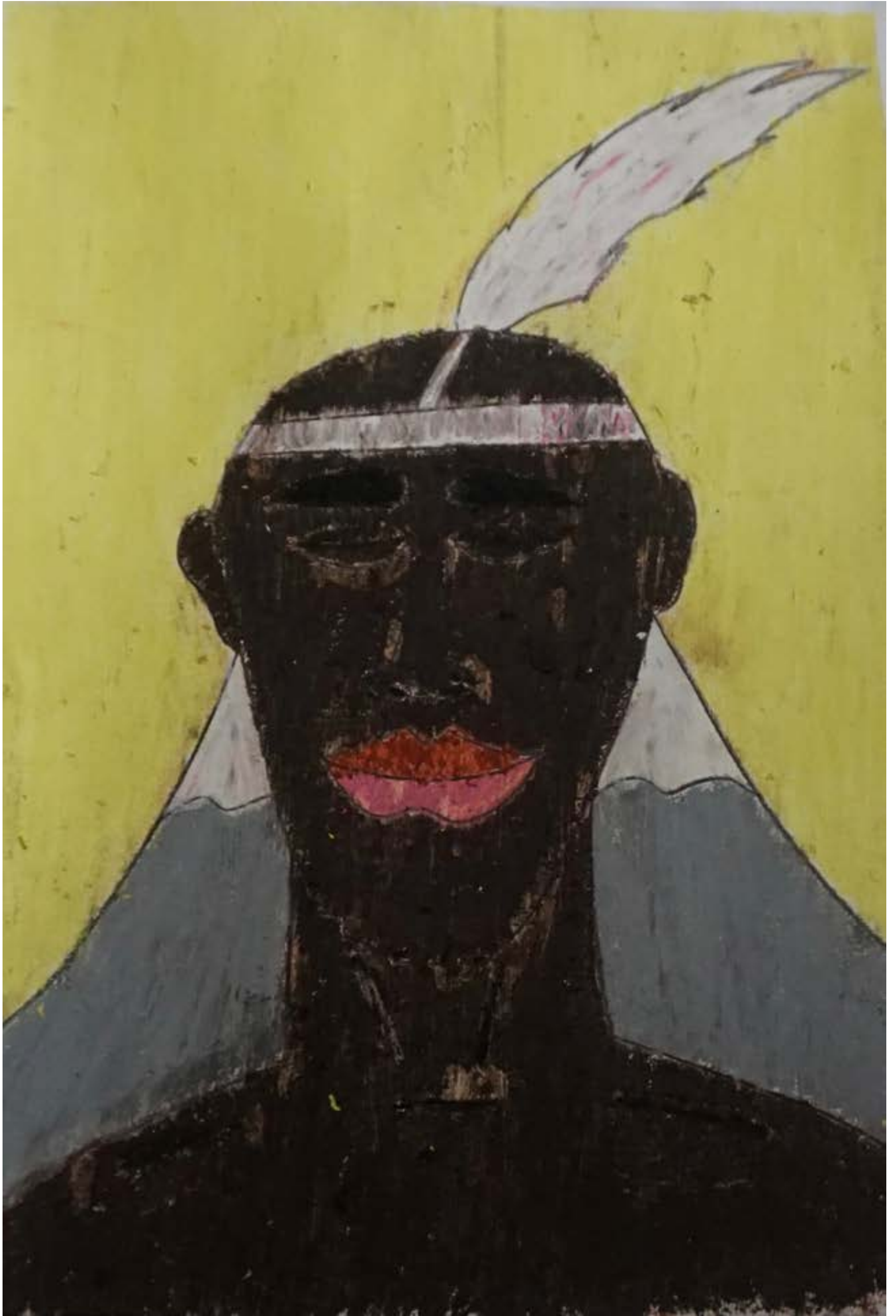


# KENNETH AIDOO

Looking at the work of Kenneth Aidoo several narratives emerge from the positioning of Black human beings - how this came to be and how it developed into today's society. He explores this in film, painting, drawings and also in his video installations. Aidoo graduated from the Gerrit Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam in 2019. He travelled to Suriname with his work Displacement to explore the triangular connection between Ghana, the Netherlands and Suriname. He has processed the results of his research questions in video and photography.

With the short film Forced, Aidoo went in search of what "imposing your will on the other" means and what happens to a person who is burdened with this. In his graduation work he looked at his origins and life experiences in the Netherlands, which resulted in a portrait series. For his final exams he made oil pastel drawings and paintings, a medium in which he still works today.

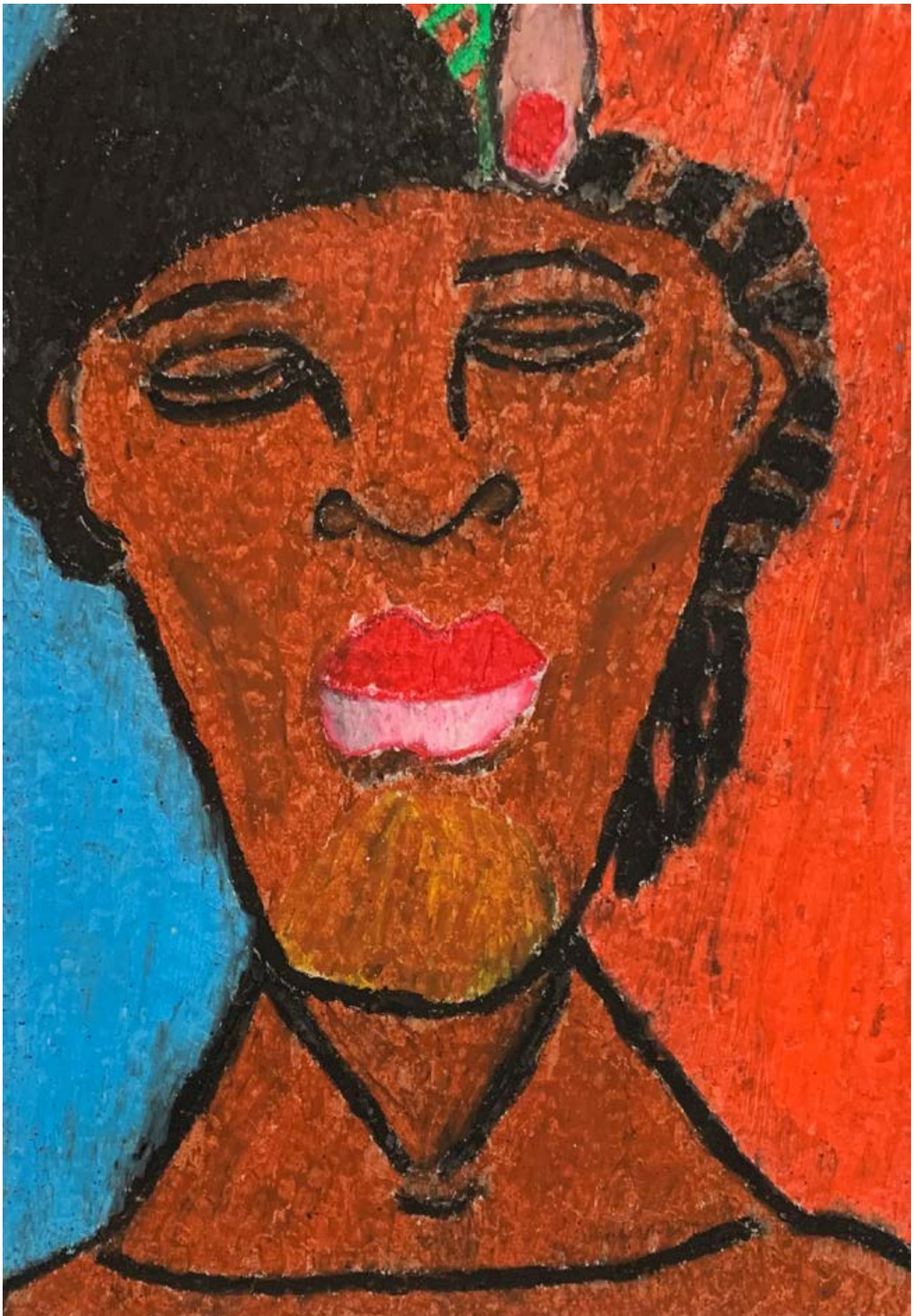
# CHAKA



2020

OIL PASTEL ON PAPER A3

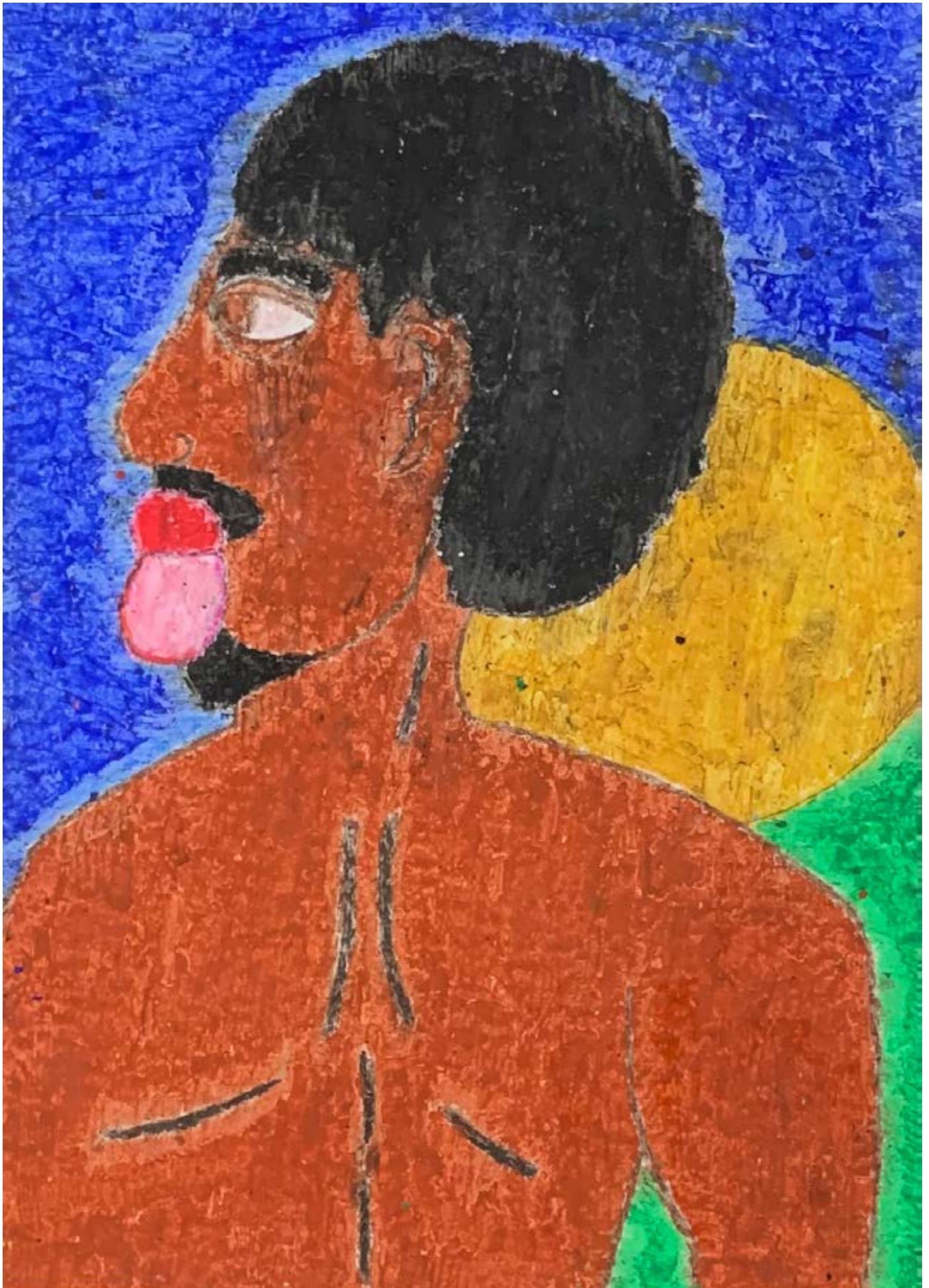
# CORNROWS



2019

OIL PASTEL ON PAPER A2

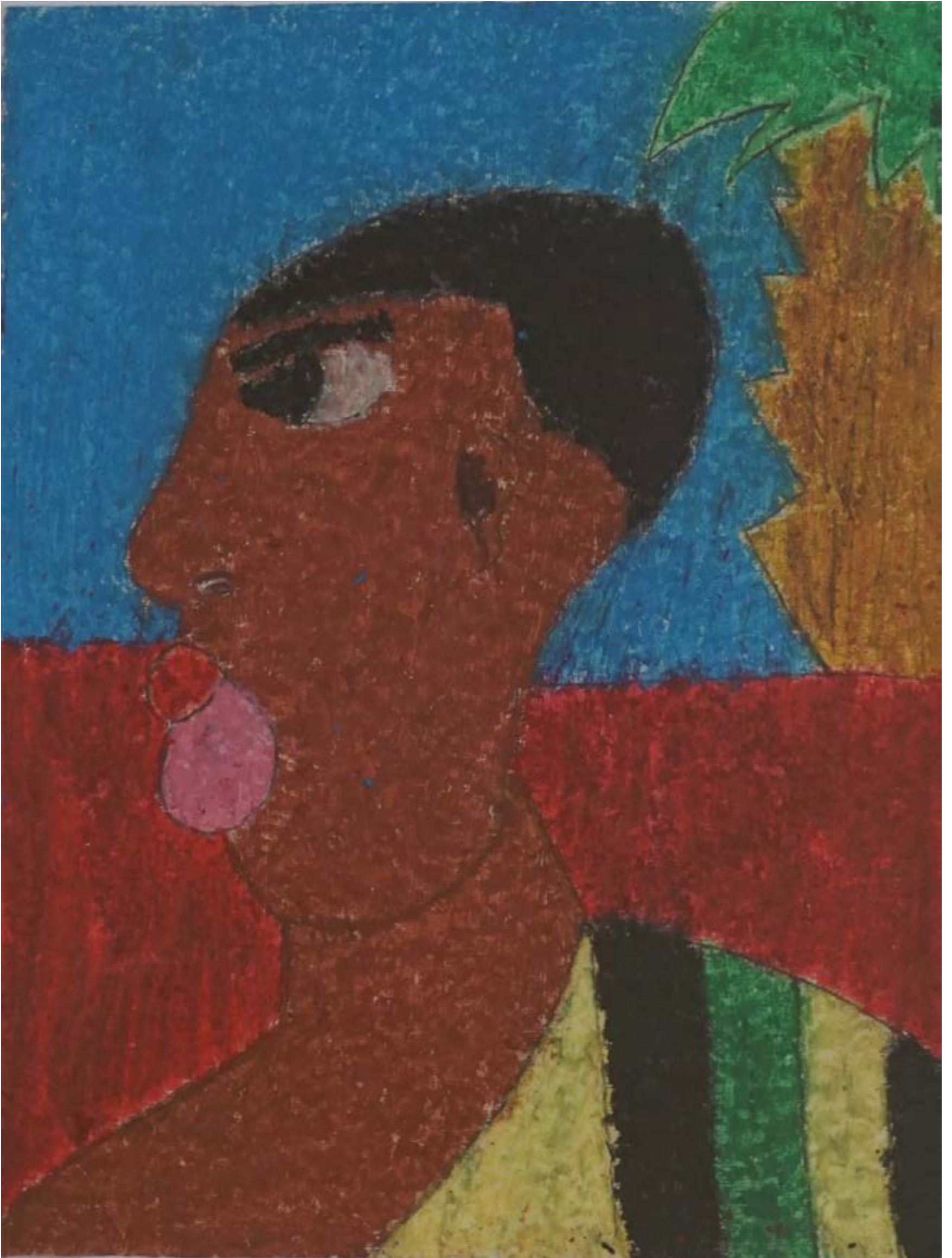
**UNTITLED (MAN FACING THE MOON.)**



**2019**

**OIL PASTEL ON PAPER A2**

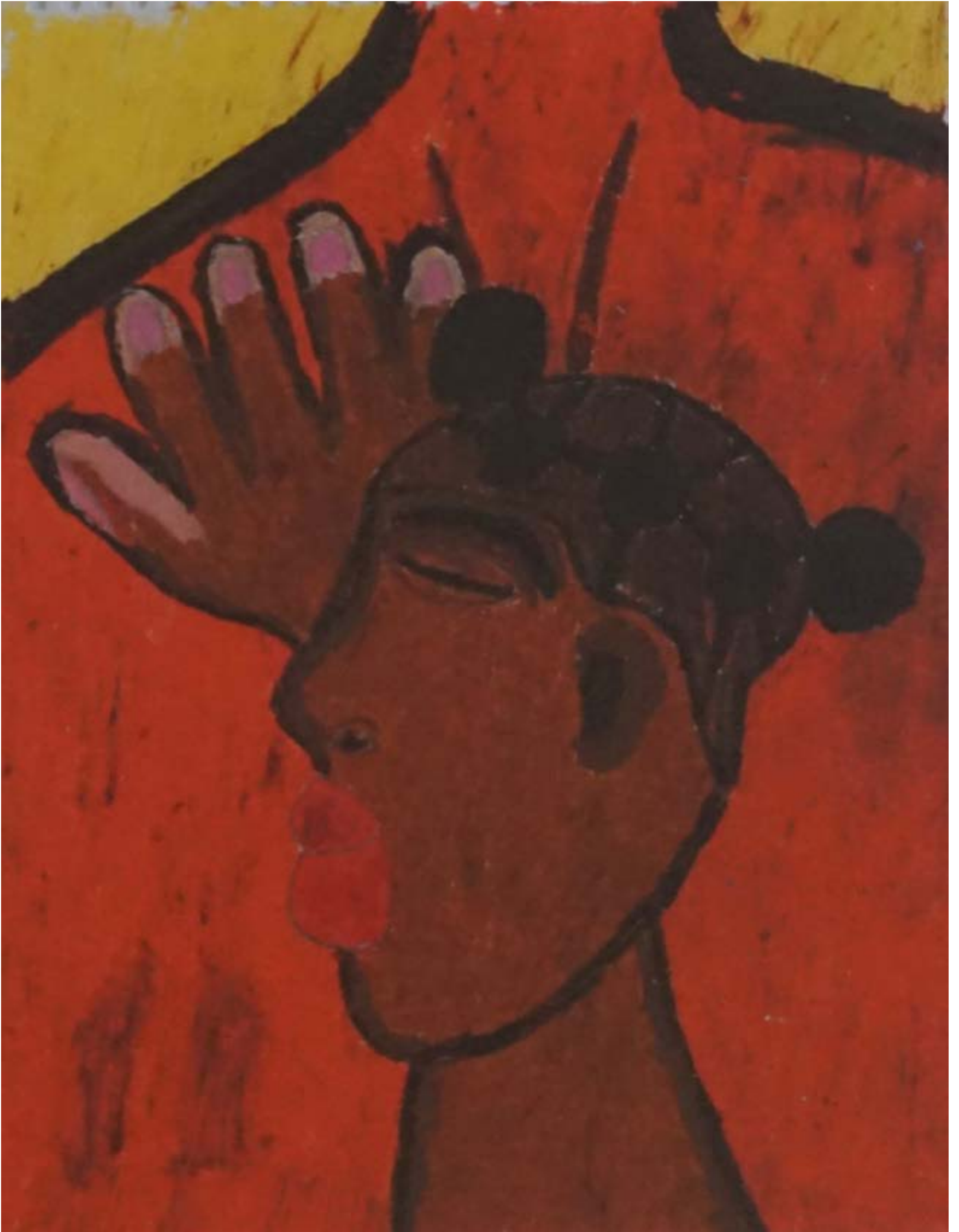
# ASANTE MAN



2020

OIL PASTEL ON PAPER A2

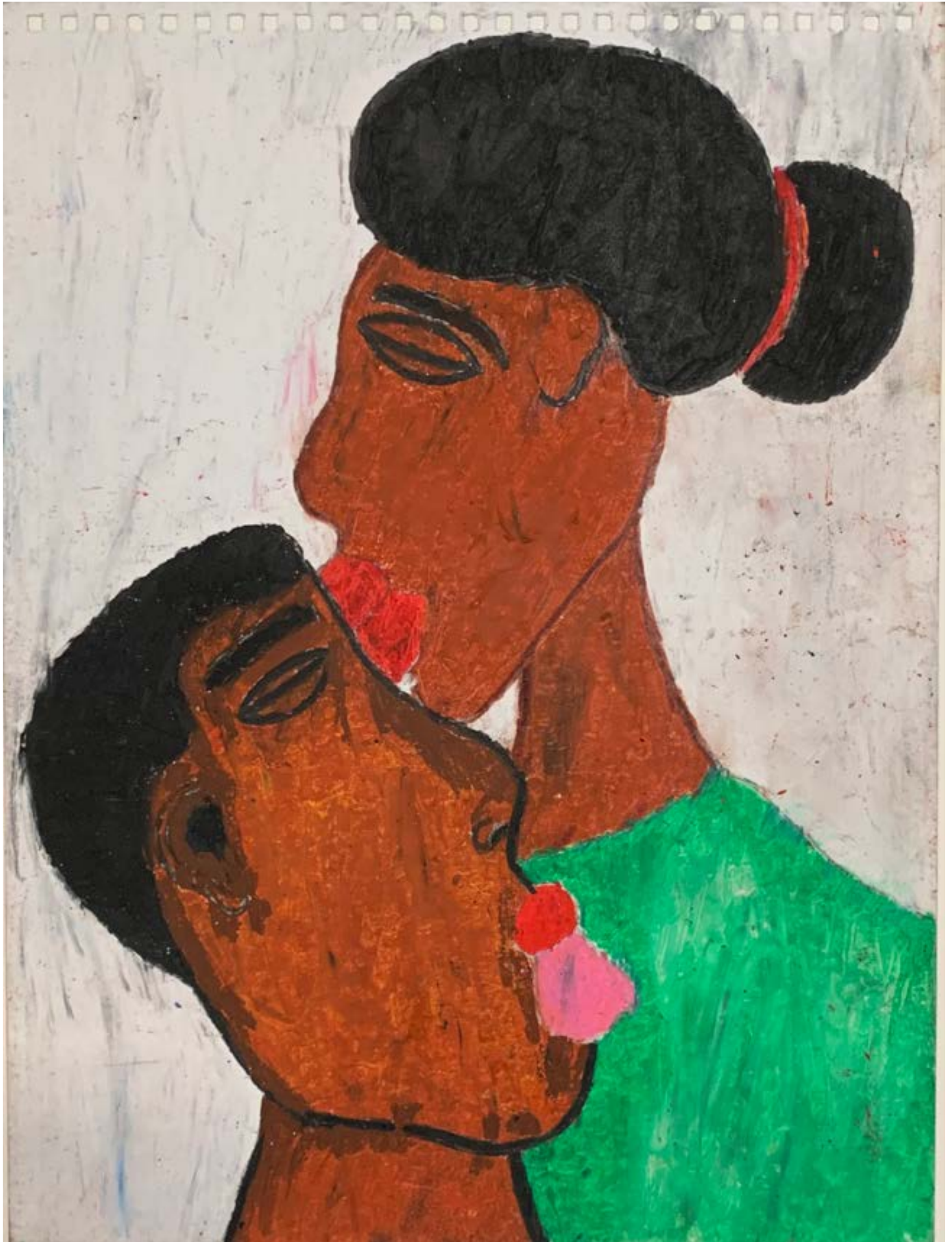
**I GOT HIS BACK. HE HAS GOT MINE.**



**2020**

**OIL PASTEL ON PAPER A2**

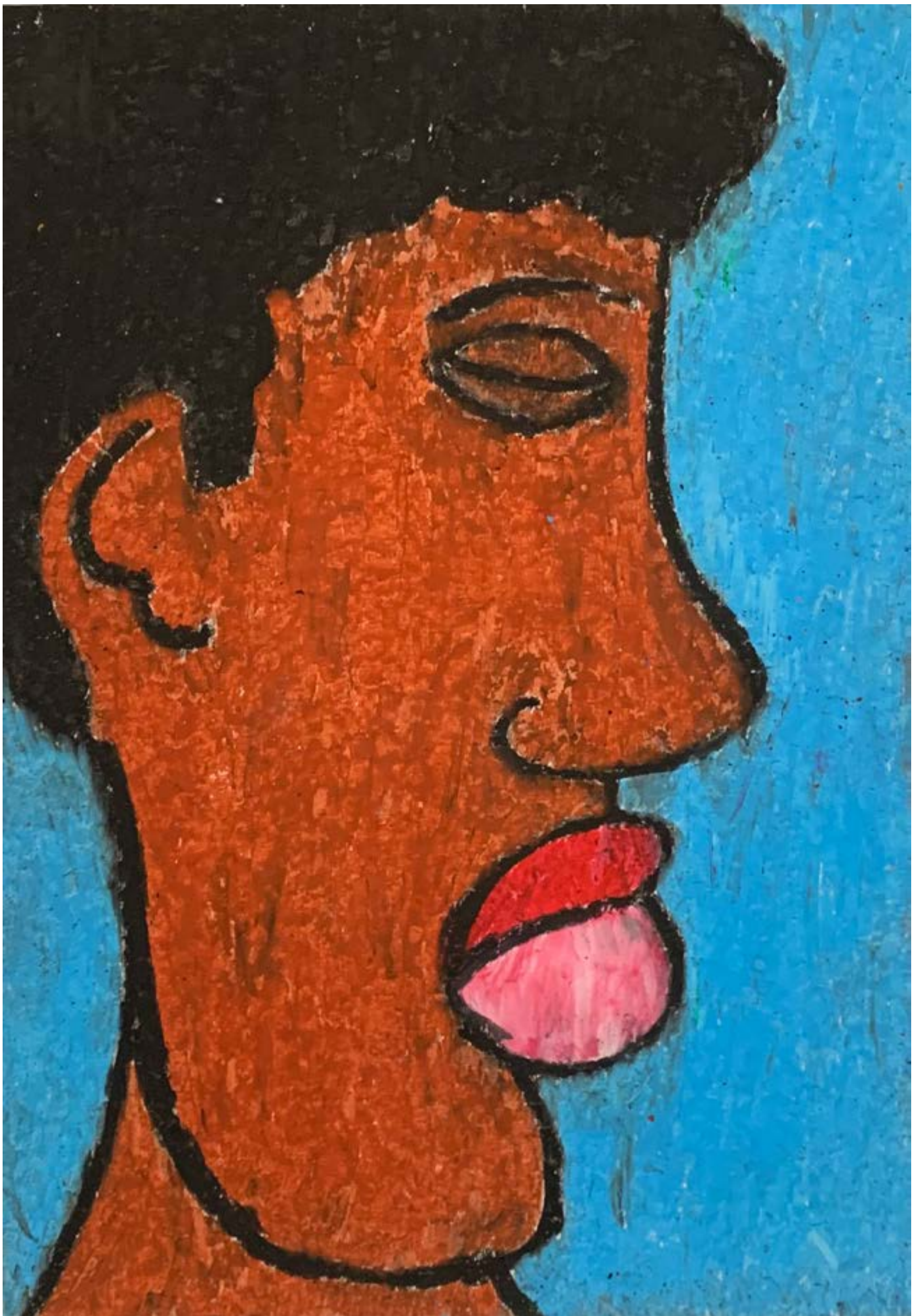
# UNTITLED (KISSING FOREHEAD)



2019

OIL PASTEL ON PAPER A2

**UNTITLED (MAN WITH THE BLUE BACKGROUND.)**

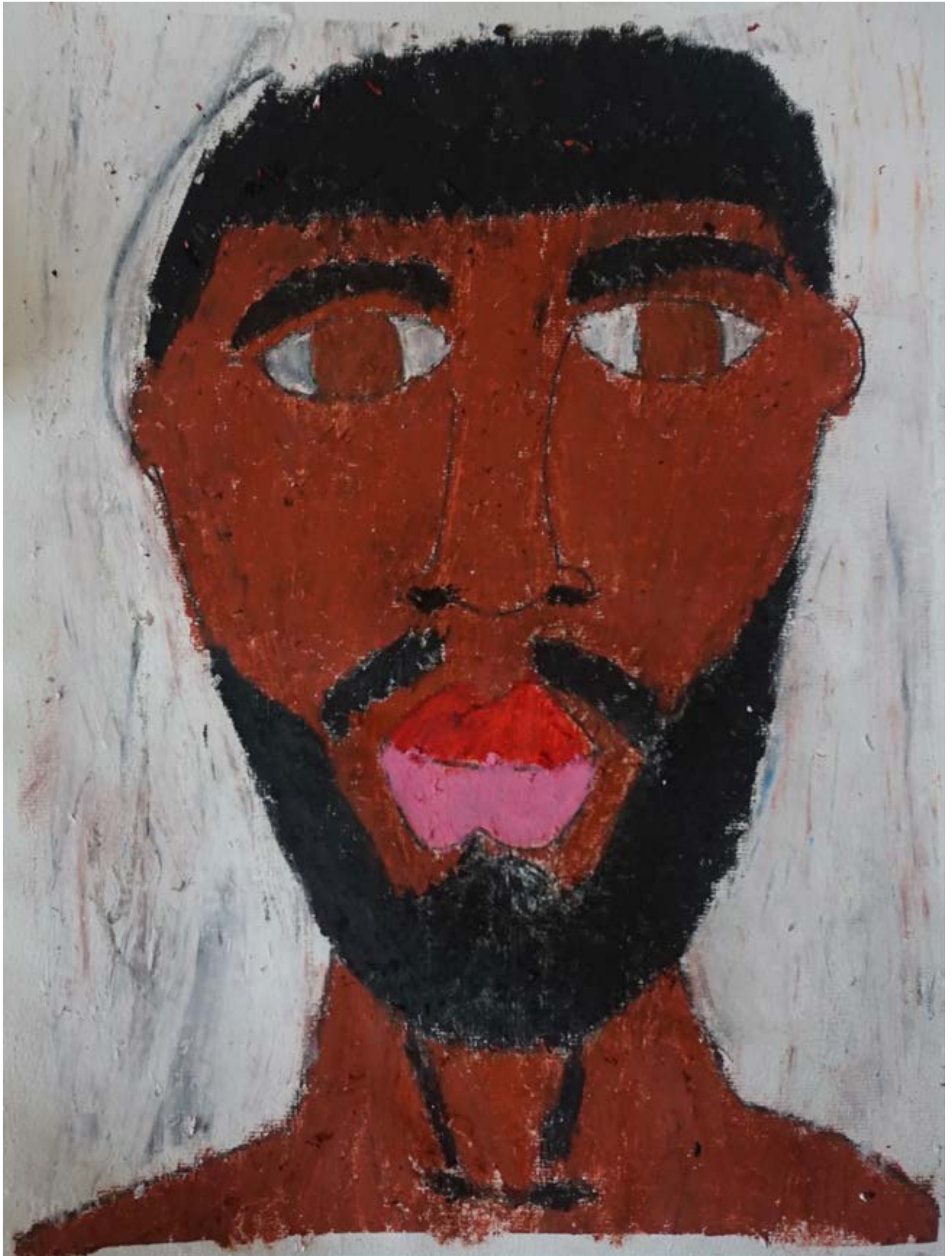


**2020**

**OIL PASTEL ON PAPER A2**



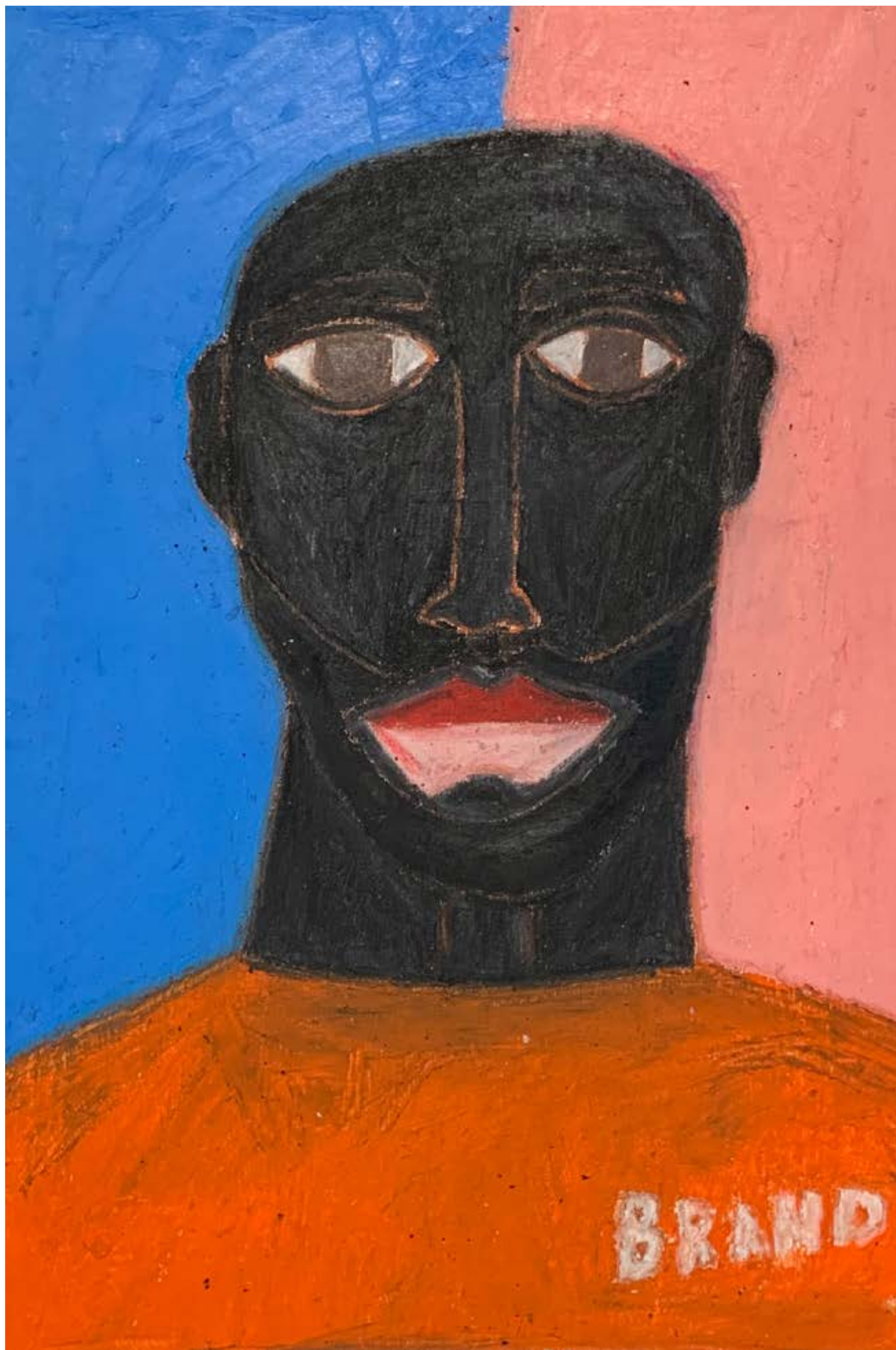
# SELF PORTRAIT



2020

OIL PASTEL ON PAPER A2

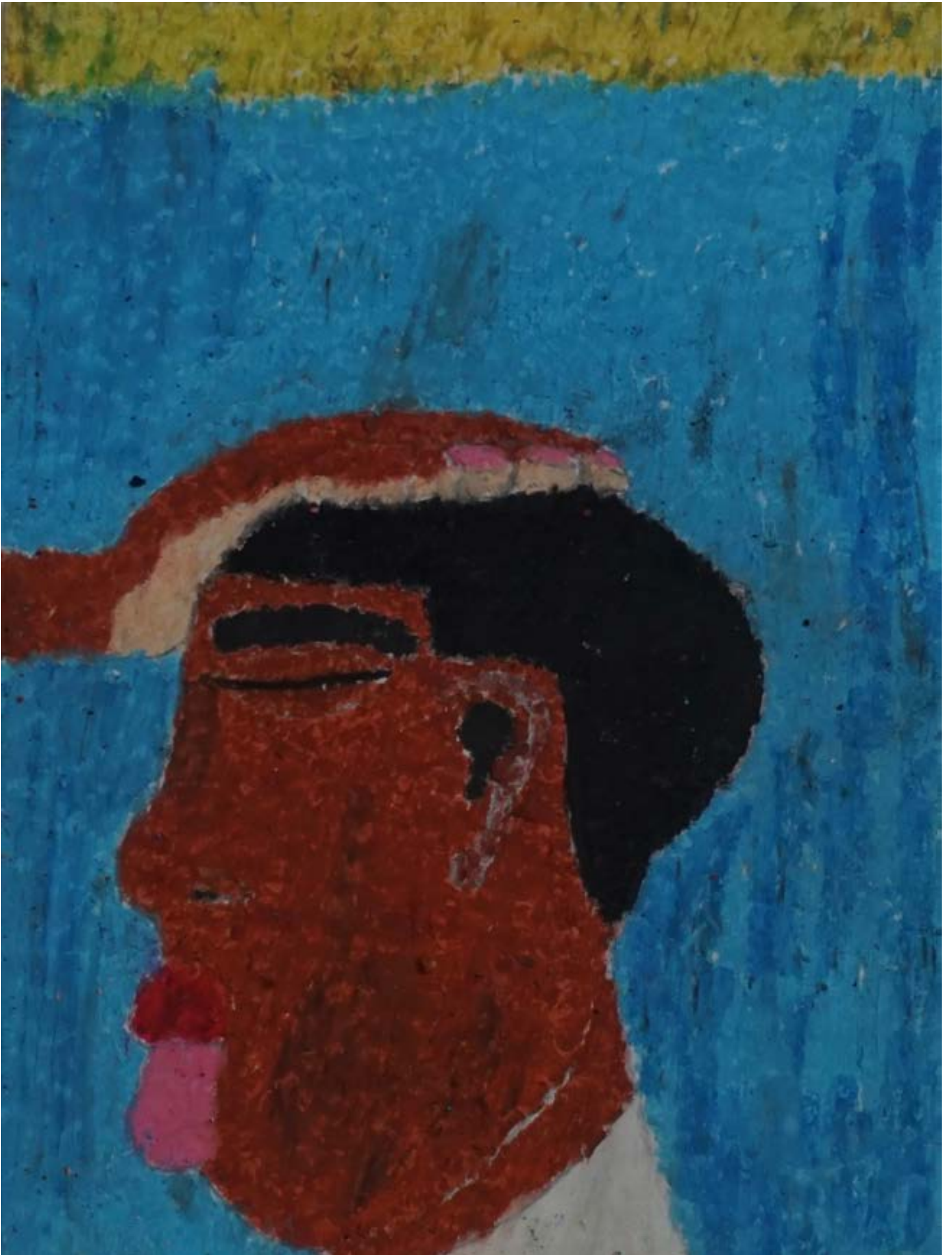
# SEWN TIGERS ON MY SHIRT



2020

OIL PASTEL ON PAPER A2

# UNTITLED (BAPTISM)



2020

OIL PASTEL ON PAPER A2

“These are paintings that I have made during the pandemic. As a recently graduated student in that period it was hard. All the places where you were able to meet people, friends, familiar faces or unknown people were shut down. There was literally no possibility to socialise.”

The different topics that were dear to my heart were the ones that translated to works. The topic of love was a reoccurring event throughout this series. Keeping faith was important to me as the days of solitude were upon us. Having the freedom to express oneself endeared me to keep this pace and share the outcome of the forth pouring of my imagination with the world.” -

# CREDITS

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