



CATINCA
TABACARU
GALLERY

NAJAAX HARUN
b. 1995 Somaliland
Booth 55



Catinca Tabacaru presents new works by Somaliland artist Najaax Harun, whose practice is grounded in the lived experiences of those around her. Harun was born in the aftermath of civil war, and her early years were defined by a shift from pre-war expressive freedom to postwar reticence, a transition she actively examines in her practice. Violent imagery sits alongside vibrant color, refusing to victimize its subjects; instead, the paintings function as acts of self-liberation, and as contributions to a wider conversation about how historical rupture shapes artistic voice.

The paintings take their collective title from a Somali proverb roughly translated as "a woman doesn't belong to her clan," a phrase that encapsulates how women's identities are transferred from birth-clan to husband's clan upon marriage. In a society where clan affiliation determines safety, status, and belonging, women occupy a perpetual liminality, never fully claimed by the communities they inhabit. Harun's work holds this displacement carefully, rendering the loss of agency not as abstraction but as something felt and specific, a tension that opens outward onto the broader experience of women navigating competing identities and expectations.

For Liste, the gallery has transformed its booth through a reinterpretation of Herbert Bayer's Diagram of the Extended Field of Vision (1930). Informed by El Lissitzky's radical spatial thinking, Bayer sought to expand perception beyond conventional, frontal modes of viewing. The installation extends this ambition: paintings are suspended at tilted angles from floor to ceiling, interspersed with black-and-white photographs of Hargeisa, Somaliland's capital. The photographs function simultaneously as observational backdrop, contextualizing the internal landscapes of the paintings, and as formal echo, their spare geometries mirroring the minimalist structures that recur in Harun's backgrounds. In bringing Bayer and Lissitzky's spatial theories into dialogue with Harun's visual language, the gallery pursues a through-line central to its program: the deep affinities between post-communist and post-colonial experience. Across these distinct histories, genuine points of alignment emerge, of contested sovereignty, suppressed identity, and the effort to construct selfhood against imposed narratives. Rather than drawing false equivalences, the gallery is interested in what these perspectives illuminate in each other: how Lissitzky and Bayer's insistence on expanding the frame of perception finds an unexpected resonance in Harun's own project of making visible what has been structurally overlooked. Pairing a historical avant-garde reference with a contemporary artist actively reinterpreting those ideas is central to the gallery's work; a means of tracing connections across geographies and generations, and of insisting that these conversations belong together.

Somaliland declared independence in 1991 following the collapse of the Somali Democratic Republic, and has since established functioning democratic institutions, though it remains largely unrecognized internationally. This history of colonial disruption, conflict, and contested sovereignty runs beneath Harun's paintings without overdetermining them. Her figures exist with full awareness of the forces arrayed against them. Engaging with Bayer's notion of expanded vision, the installation asks us to extend that expansion further: past reductive frameworks of gender, past the flattened narratives of post-colonial experience, toward something more exacting and more alive.



Najaax Huran

The finale, 2026

Acrylic on canvas, 100 x 202 cm

Najaax Huran

Phantom of the Unlived life, 2026

Acrylic on canvas, 150 x 150 cm



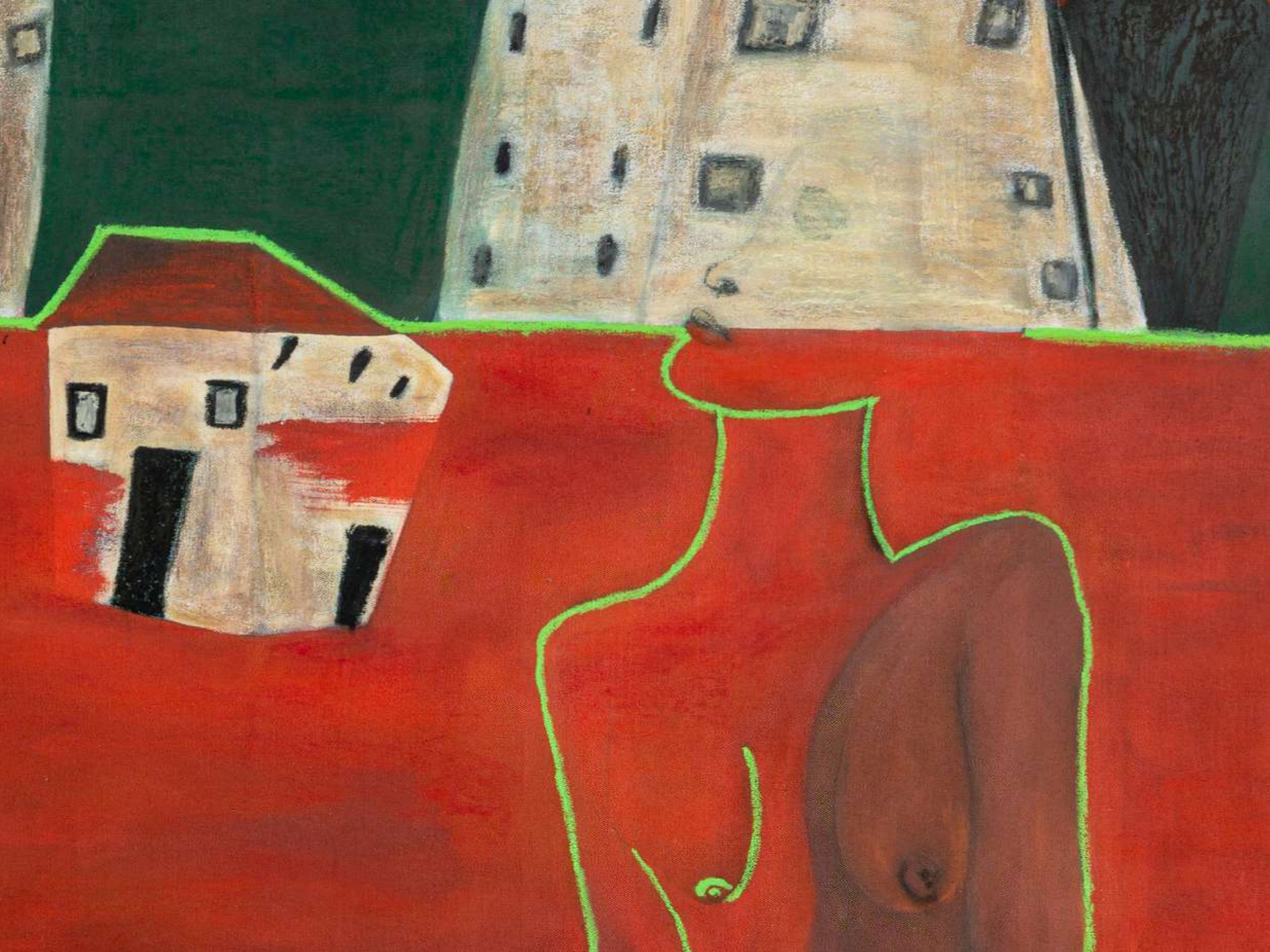




Najaax Huran
The pledge, 2026
Acrylic on Canvas
140 x 100 cm



Najaax Huran
Inherited feet, 2026
Acrylic on Canvas, 100 x 150 cm





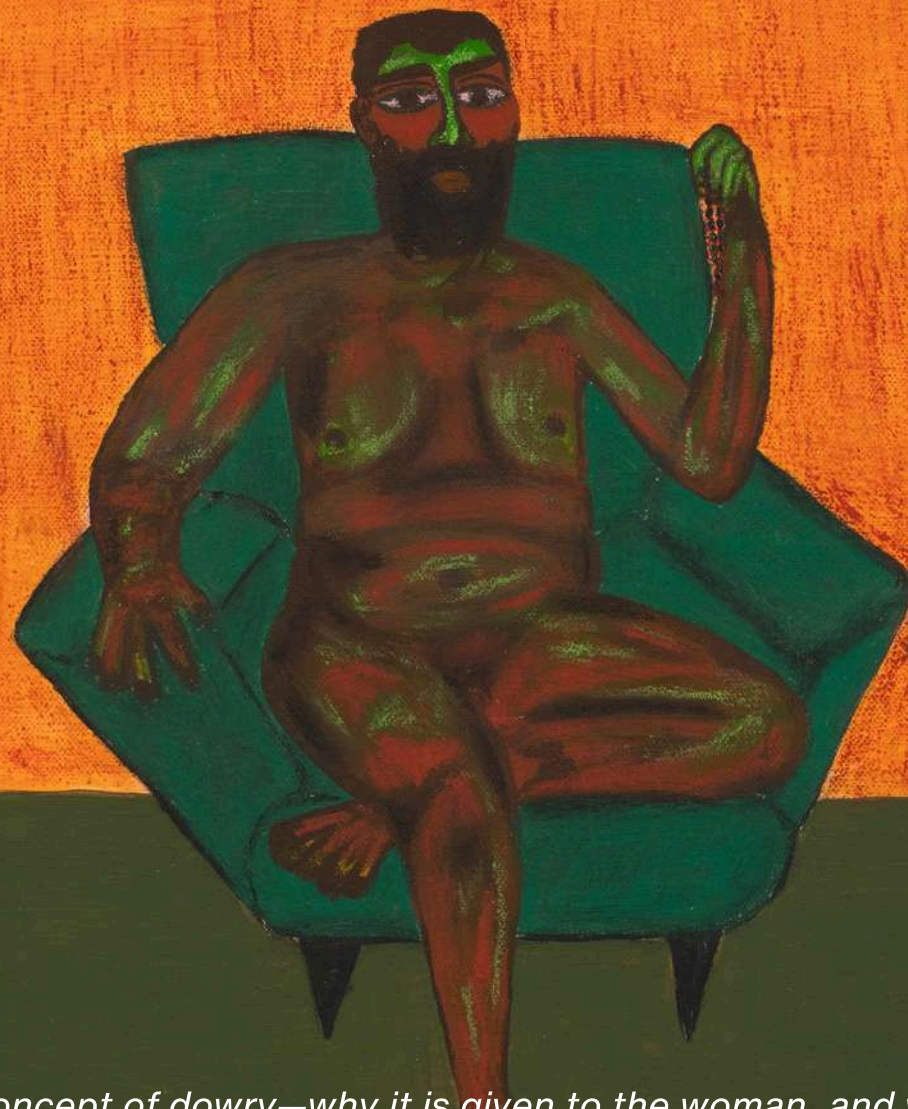
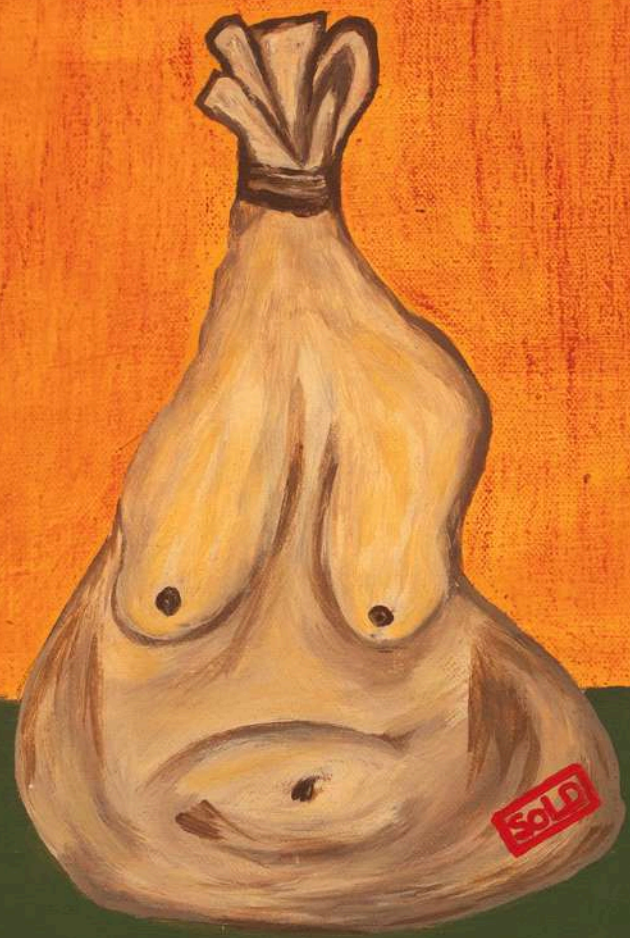
Najjaax Huran

magaalo, 2026

Acrylic on canvas | 150 x 150 cm



Najaax Huran
sold, 2026
Acrylic paint on Jute sack and cotton
120 x 66 cm



From a young age, I questioned the concept of dowry—why it is given to the woman, and why men are the ones offering it. If marriage is a mutual agreement, what is the need for this exchange? As I grew older and engaged in conversations with both women and men, I came to understand that many women see the size of their dowry as a reflection of their honor and social status. Among peers, there is an eagerness to learn how much a friend's dowry was, as if this figure measures her worth. For men, dowry often signifies power—an indication of financial prowess. Beyond the couple, the woman's family also plays a role, negotiating the dowry as if bargaining for a prized possession they have nurtured, now seeking compensation that reflects her value. While religion intersects with these practices, my painting does not focus on that aspect. Rather, it offers a commentary on how the community views women as commodities, their worth determined by monetary exchange.



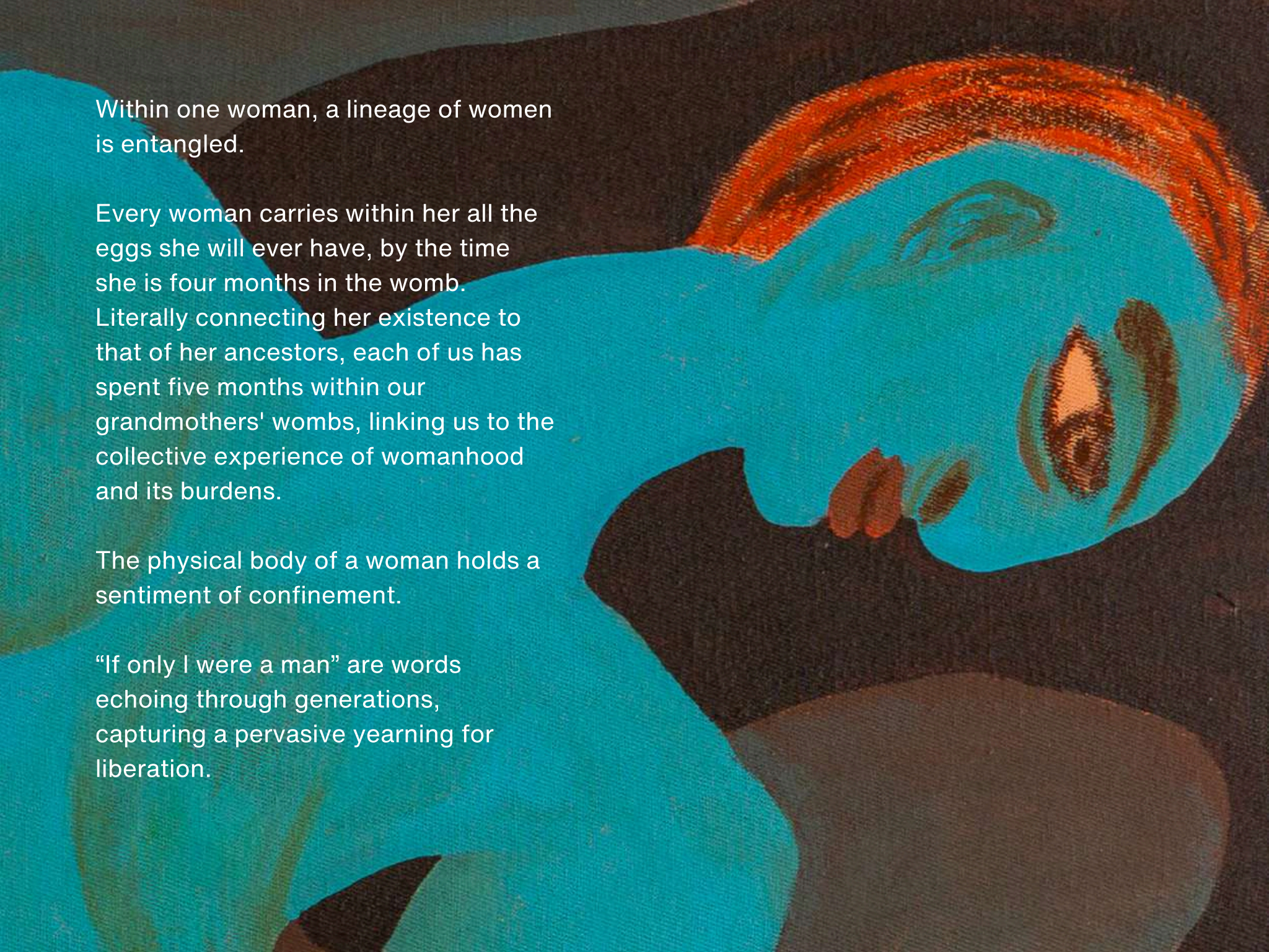
Najaax Harun
new item, 2024, acrylic and oil pastels on canvas, 66 x 45 cm



Split by a seam, two figures crouch
—one rooted, the other recoiling.
One watched, the other watching.
Thread binds the head; eyes
encircle it. Surveillance becomes
second skin. Strength and
vulnerability wrestle beneath the
surface—two shadows stitched into
one body, both trying to be whole.



Najaax Harun, Two Shadows, One Skin, 2025
acrylic and oil pastels on canvas, 100 x 150 cm



Within one woman, a lineage of women
is entangled.

Every woman carries within her all the
eggs she will ever have, by the time
she is four months in the womb.
Literally connecting her existence to
that of her ancestors, each of us has
spent five months within our
grandmothers' wombs, linking us to the
collective experience of womanhood
and its burdens.

The physical body of a woman holds a
sentiment of confinement.

“If only I were a man” are words
echoing through generations,
capturing a pervasive yearning for
liberation.



Najaax Harun
trapped, 2024, acrylic and oil pastels on canvas, 100 x 100 cm

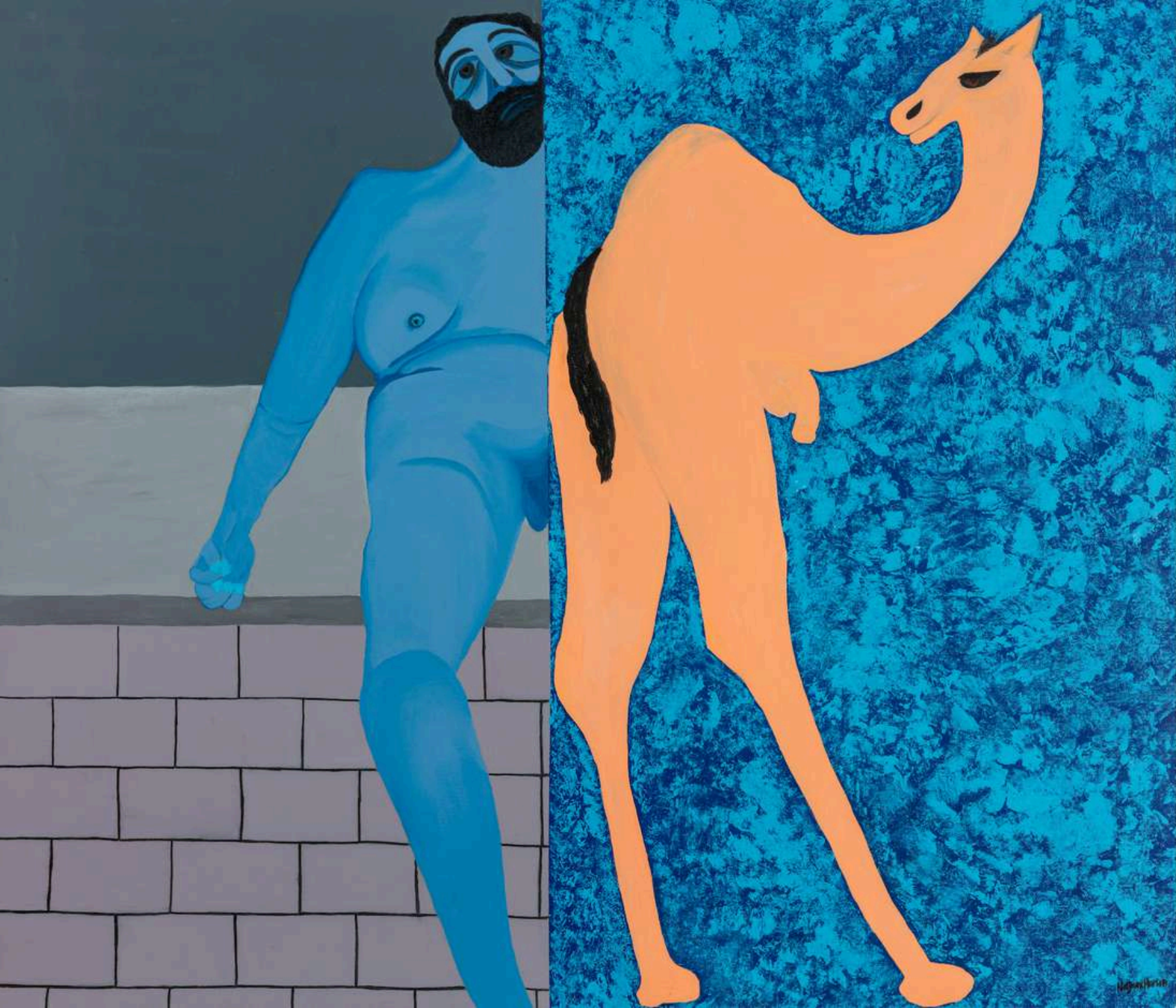
Huran conjures a phantom and a dream—an echo of what lingers.

In Somali culture, the camel stands as a symbol of strength and worth. Here, it becomes something else: an emblem of masculinity, once honored, now distorted. A surreal image—a camel in a bathtub—stands untouchable, absurd, and sacred. It reflects how cultural ideals can become distant, unreachable, even grotesque.

Before it, a faceless male figure folds into himself, body sinking into shadow, a form dissolving beneath the weight of unspoken expectations. Toxic masculinity, born of cultural myth and legacy, consumes not only women but men as well—hollowing them from within.

The pieces traces how revered symbols become ghosts, haunting those who can no longer carry their meaning.





Najiax Harun

Masculinity as Fabricated Dream, 2024

acrylic and oil pastels on canvas, 120 x 140 cm



Najaax Harun
Beneath the Fathers, 2024
acrylic and oil pastels on canvas
170 x 120 cm



NAJAAX HARUN | B. 1995 SOMALILAND

Born in the aftermath of a civil war that prompted a mass return to their homeland now known as Somaliland, Harun's formative years unfolded in an environment marked by a conspicuous shift in the expressive dynamics of her community. The post-war era witnessed a palpable reticence compared to the pre-war period, particularly in the realm of artistic expression. This transformation serves as a poignant backdrop to Harun's creative pursuits, as she revives and illuminates the dormant stories that lie beneath the surface of her community's collective consciousness. In doing so, she contributes to a broader dialogue about the impact of historical events on artistic expression and the enduring power of storytelling in shaping cultural narratives.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2026 LISTE Art Fair, Catinca Tabacaru Gallery, Basel
- 2024 *Hagoogtir/Unveiling*, Catinca Tabacaru, Bucharest

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2025 *The Third Space*; Collateral Exhibition to the 6th Art Encounters Biennial; French Institute, Timisoare, RO
- A New Beginning*, Ross-Sutton, Stockholm
- 2024 *Control*, Goethe Institut Bukarest, RO; Curators: Catinca Tabacaru and Raphael Guilbert
- 2023 *The Line Between*, BrushTuArt, Kenya
- HOY*, National Museum of Somalia, Mogadishu

COLLECTIONS

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