

MARGARET HUNTER • BUNCH OF PERSON



Margaret Hunter

Bunch of Person

ART FIRST CONTEMPORARY ART



Art First

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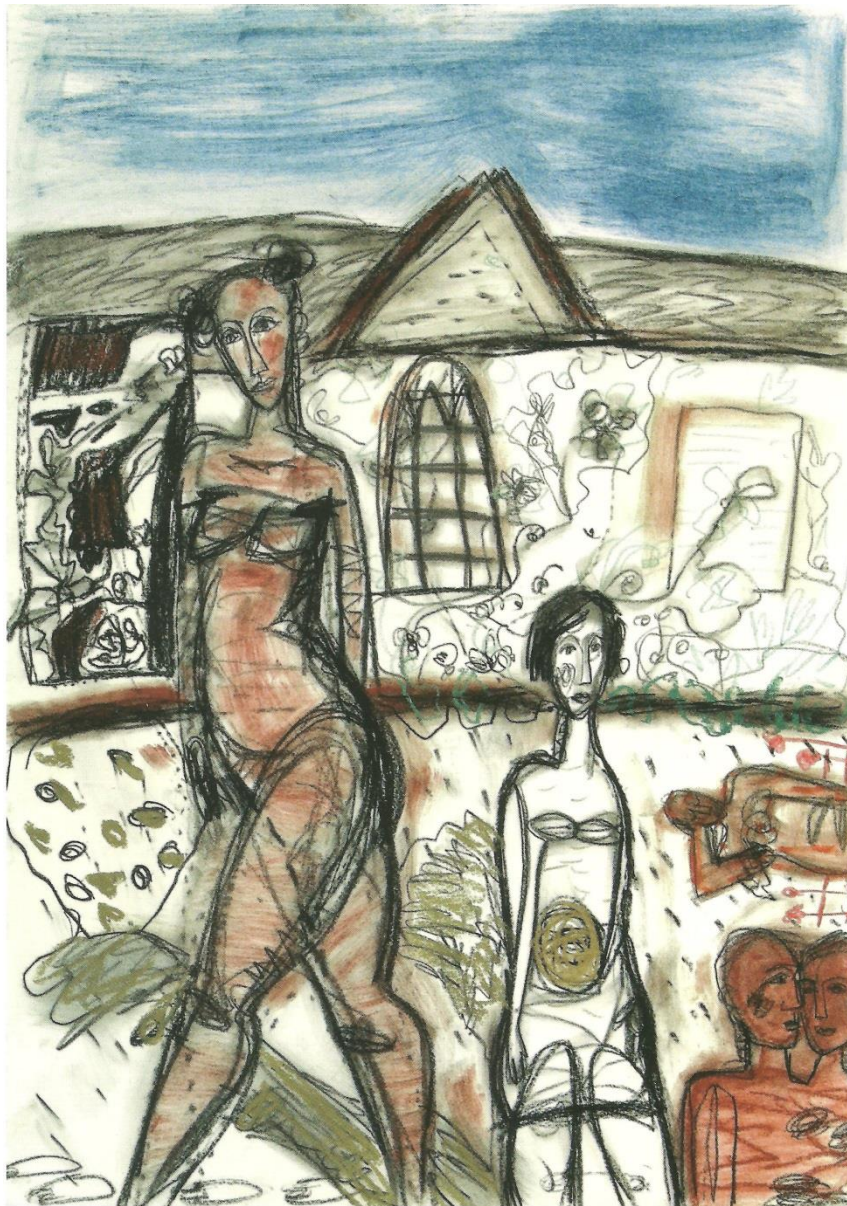
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Maiden Chambers Series 10 – Garden, 2006, pastel on paper, 59.5 x 42 cm

Bunch of Person

Margaret Hunter's new work shows a marked change of direction from her previous exhibitions at Art First in 2000 and 2002, although the title, *Bunch of Person*, refers back to an eponymous painting of 1999/2000, in which a red female figure holds a round-bellied pot with two narrow necks from which sprout Mackintosh-like flower stems. Like other artists, for example Cecil Collins or even Howard Hodgkin, whose work is grounded less in direct visual observation than in memory, experience and imagination, but who are nevertheless intellectual, Hunter has a store of personal symbolic forms from which she draws almost unconsciously. These shapes are endlessly variable, changing and evolving with time and circumstance; some will lie fallow then re-emerge unbidden. An oblique, abstracted language such as hers holds us at a distance at the same time as it fascinates and intrigues, endlessly provoking imaginative speculation.

Previously, Hunter's stylised but highly expressive figures, bounded by a thick, textured black line whose rhythm shapes their body language, were not so much

persons as personifications of what Louise Jordan has called 'ideas of belonging and attachment'. Her figures represented, at several removes of abstraction, a person known intimately to her - her own self, a man, a friend, perhaps daughters or young women, but despite the sensuality and elegance of her paintings, it was not all a case of joyful serenity. In our globalised art world, every artist of note lists at least two world cities as their place of work or residence, so Margaret Hunter's dual residence in Berlin and Scotland, where she returns frequently, would seem to be nothing out of the ordinary, but this trans-national existence brings with it the tensions of separation, distance and identity. Paintings and drawings of a sleeping, recumbent figure, echoed by a smaller figure in the distance, or of a figure pricked by leaves or cacti, seemed indicative of the pleasure and pain attending the crucial choices we make about where and how we live.

By contrast, the new work in *Bunch of Person* seems to indicate that emotional closure has occurred and a path has been chosen, perhaps involuntarily. This work was made over a period of almost five months which Hunter spent on a country estate in Northumberland. She has spent periods working abroad before, for instance in Finland and Mallorca, and her work has been influenced by the culture and environment of these places, but has not fundamentally changed. It is rare for an artist to move from an abstract to a naturalistic style - usually the move is the other way- but this has been her response to working in this corner of north east England, close to the border with Scotland.



Maiden Chambers Series 3 – Bow, 2006, pastel on paper, 59.5 x 42 cm

This part of Britain is rich in historical associations and Hunter became fascinated by a particular local story. Within a wood bordering the estate is a sandstone crag known as Maiden Chambers. In Ancient Greece, a bride was ritually sequestered in a maiden chamber the night before her wedding, but the crag was so named for less happy reasons: spanning the 15th century, for over a hundred lawless years, 'Border Reivers' carried out constant cross-border raids, stealing cattle and livestock, raping and abducting women. According to local legend, women hid under the crag to escape the attentions of the Reivers.

Reiver Maiden is the most striking of the group of eight sculptures made from beech, lime, yew and chestnut. In a triangular posture reminiscent of that in a painting of 1999/2000, *Moving On*, this robber maiden (no victim she) possesses strength and confidence. Her breasts and thighs thrust forward like a battering ram; her hair flies out behind her, giving an impression of forward movement at the same time as her rigid arms that clutch her ankles seem to root her to the spot. Her companions *Extra-Stretch* and *Dancer* are similarly uninhibited, if less aggressive, flaunting the elasticity of youth.

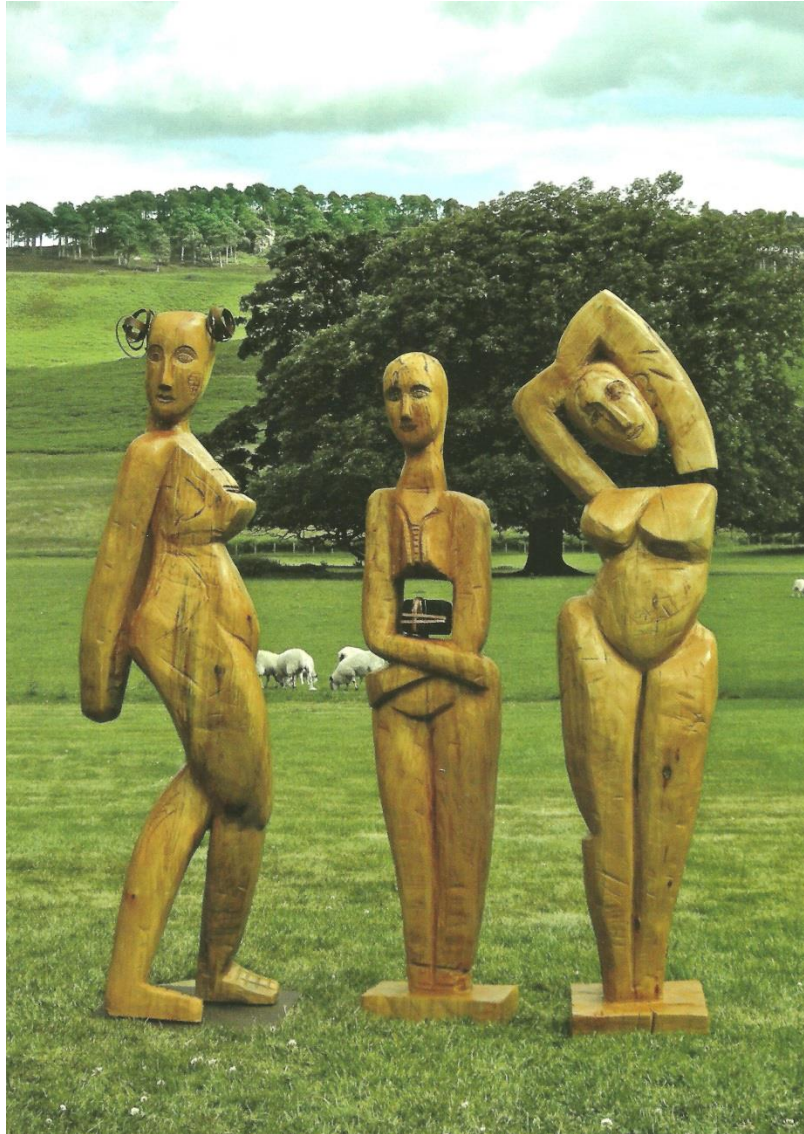
The move from abstraction to a greater naturalism, almost portraiture, is more marked in the new paintings and drawings. The artist has said that none of these figures are based on real people, and the shift is simply her response to the story of the Maiden Chambers, but the inspiration for them undoubtedly comes from a source that she has seen and absorbed. Mask-like faces have given way to heads with features, and the eyes possess a gaze and radiate a personality. A deep raspberry pink pervades *Pond*, *Part of the Pattern II* and *Lily*, forcefully

asserting itself against tones of bright green, cerulean blue and black. The backgrounds are broken up, less thick and textured, more fluid and aquatic. Perhaps it is going too far to associate these images with inception, pregnancy and birth, but it is almost unavoidable when looking at the female figure in *Lily*, with her downward, inward gaze and swollen belly.

Intimations of landscape are often present in Hunter's work, but now there are recognisable trees, fields and hills forming an Arcadian backdrop to the young women with an alluring, confident gaze in *Dancer's Tracks*, *Then and There* and *Background Ties*. They are partially surrounded by a white rectangle like a luminous transparent aura that marks out these ravishing creatures as blessed. All kinds of marks and lines denoting the landscape beyond have been drawn into the light painted areas, connecting the coloured idea of the present with the faded past. The summation of these sculptures and paintings is the large drawing *Garden*: sky, hills and a low building with a Gothic window and climbing plants shelter a tall girl with rosebud knots in her hair, a girl with a black bob, an entwined couple and a recumbent man. A temporary reprieve from the Reivers perhaps, in the Garden of Eden.

Angela Weight

October 2006



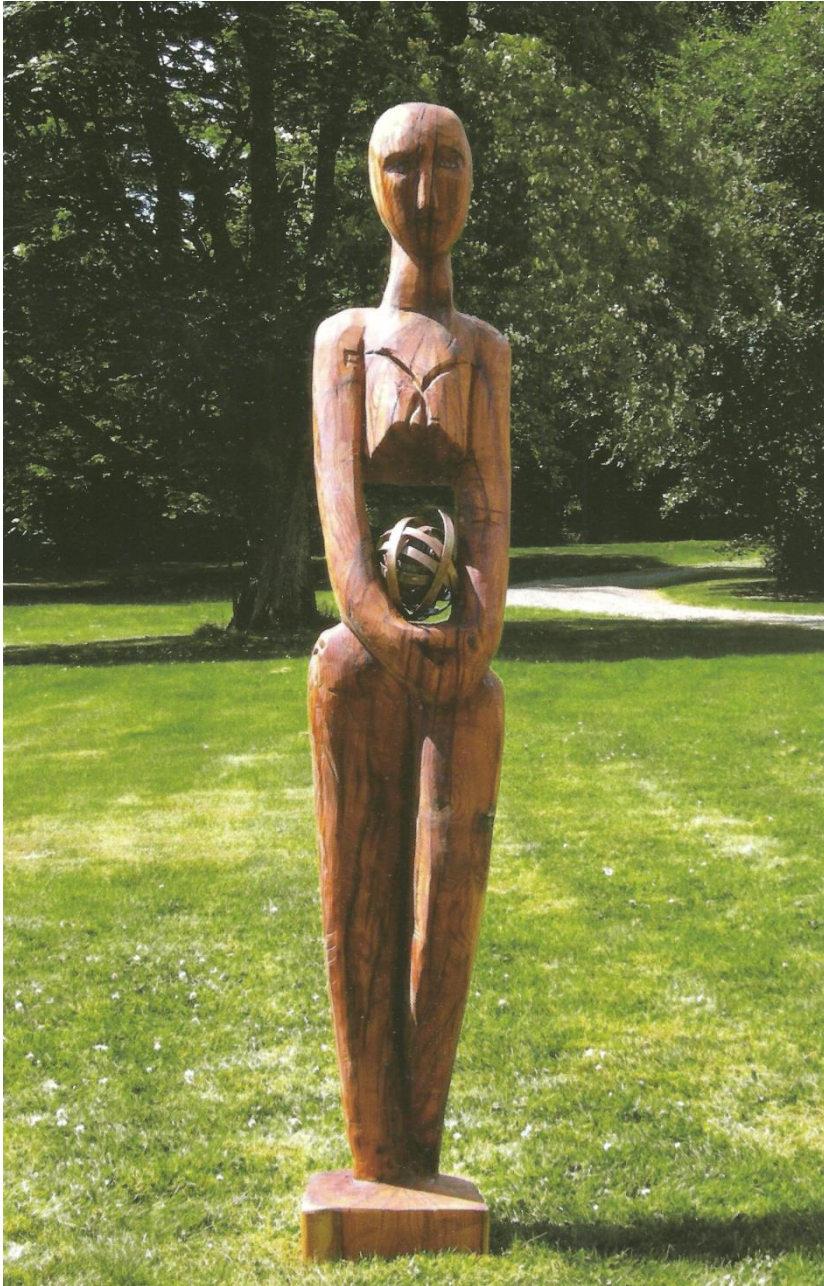
Dancer, 2006, chestnut and steel 153 X 50 X 41.5 cm

Holding Hope, 2006 beech and copper wire, 146 x 30 x 21.5 cm

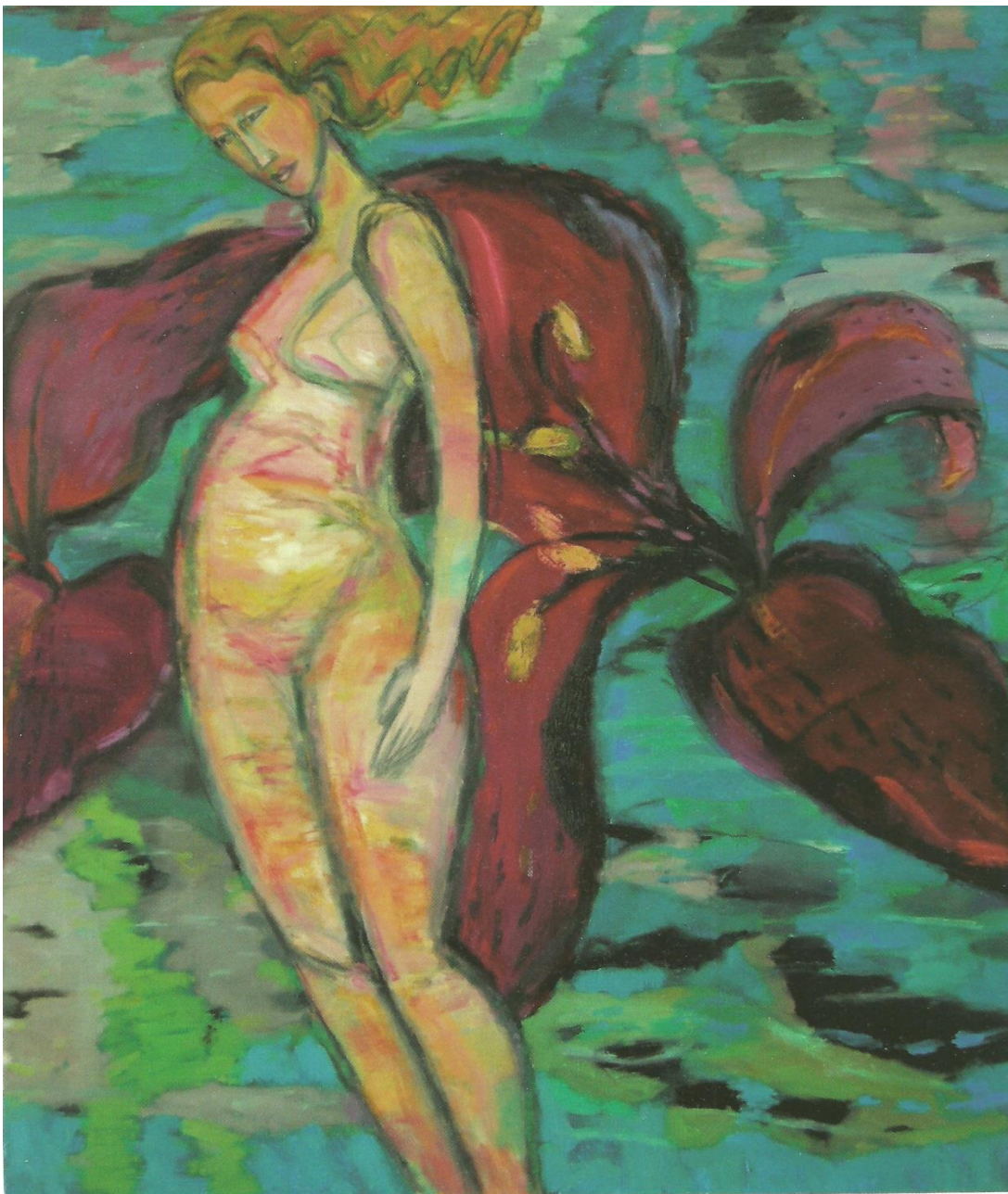
Extra Stretch, 2006, lime, 156 x 27 x 26.5 cm



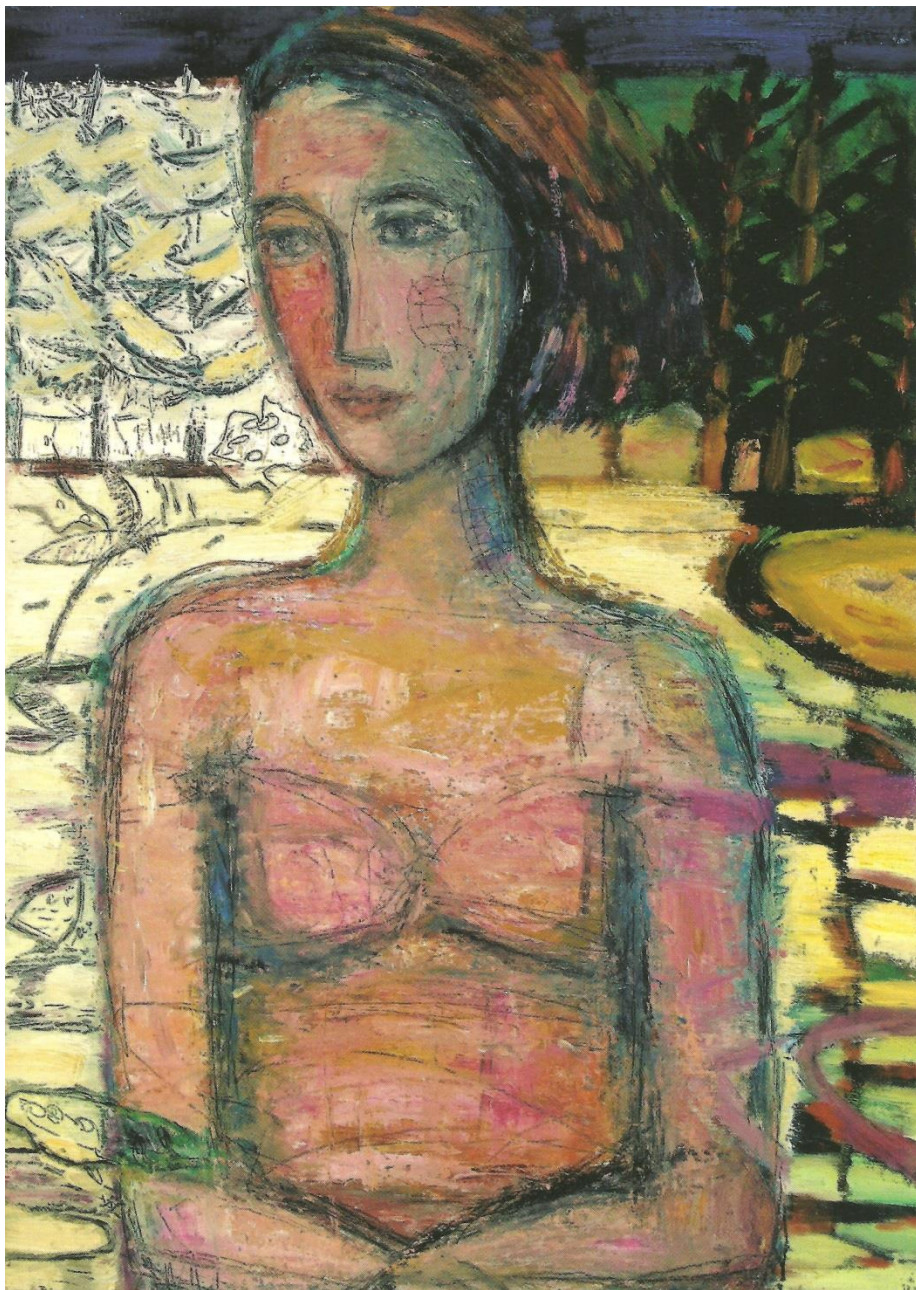
Reiver Maiden, 2006, beech, 110 x 75 x 34 cm



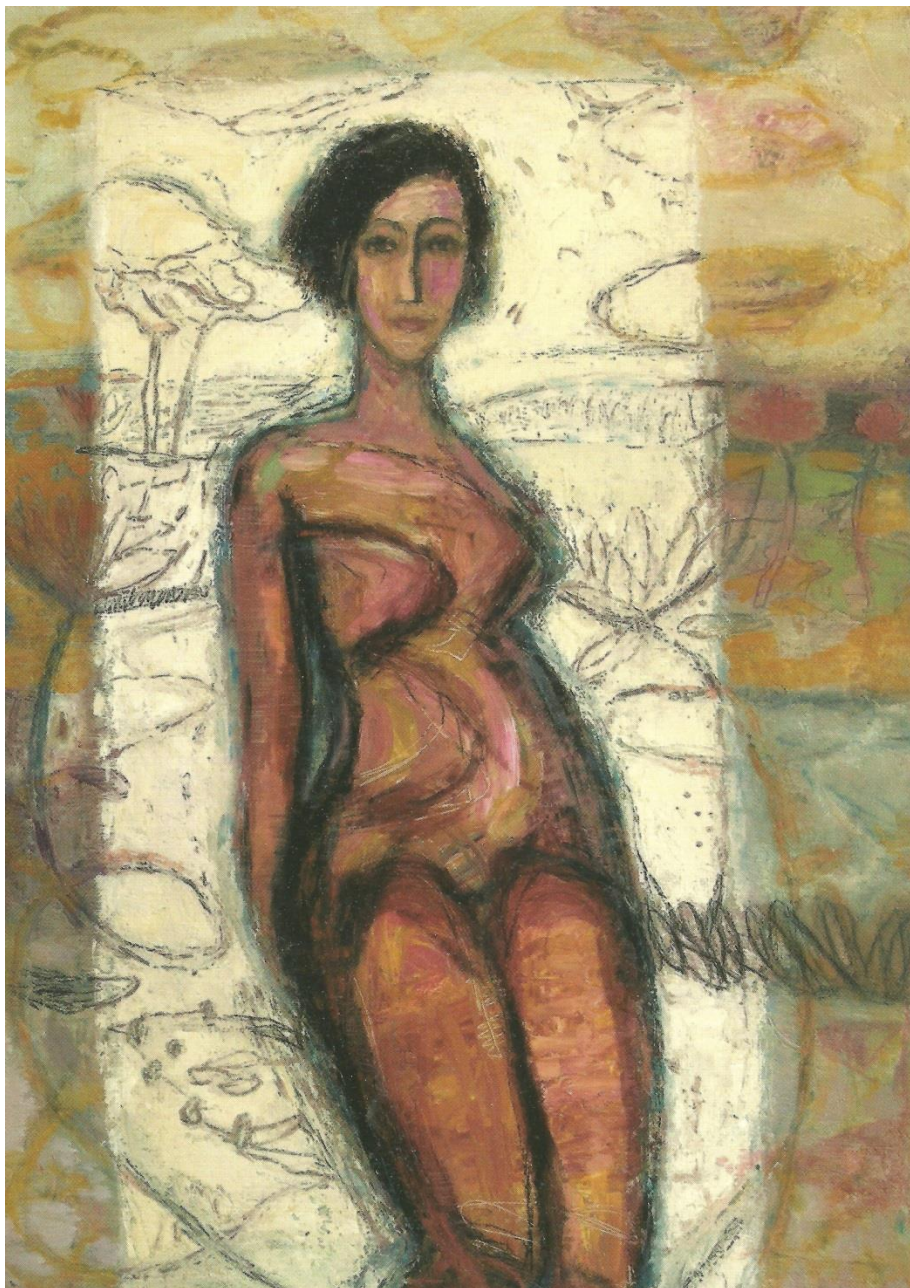
Still Figure, 2006, yew, copper and steel, 168 x 24.5 x 25 cm



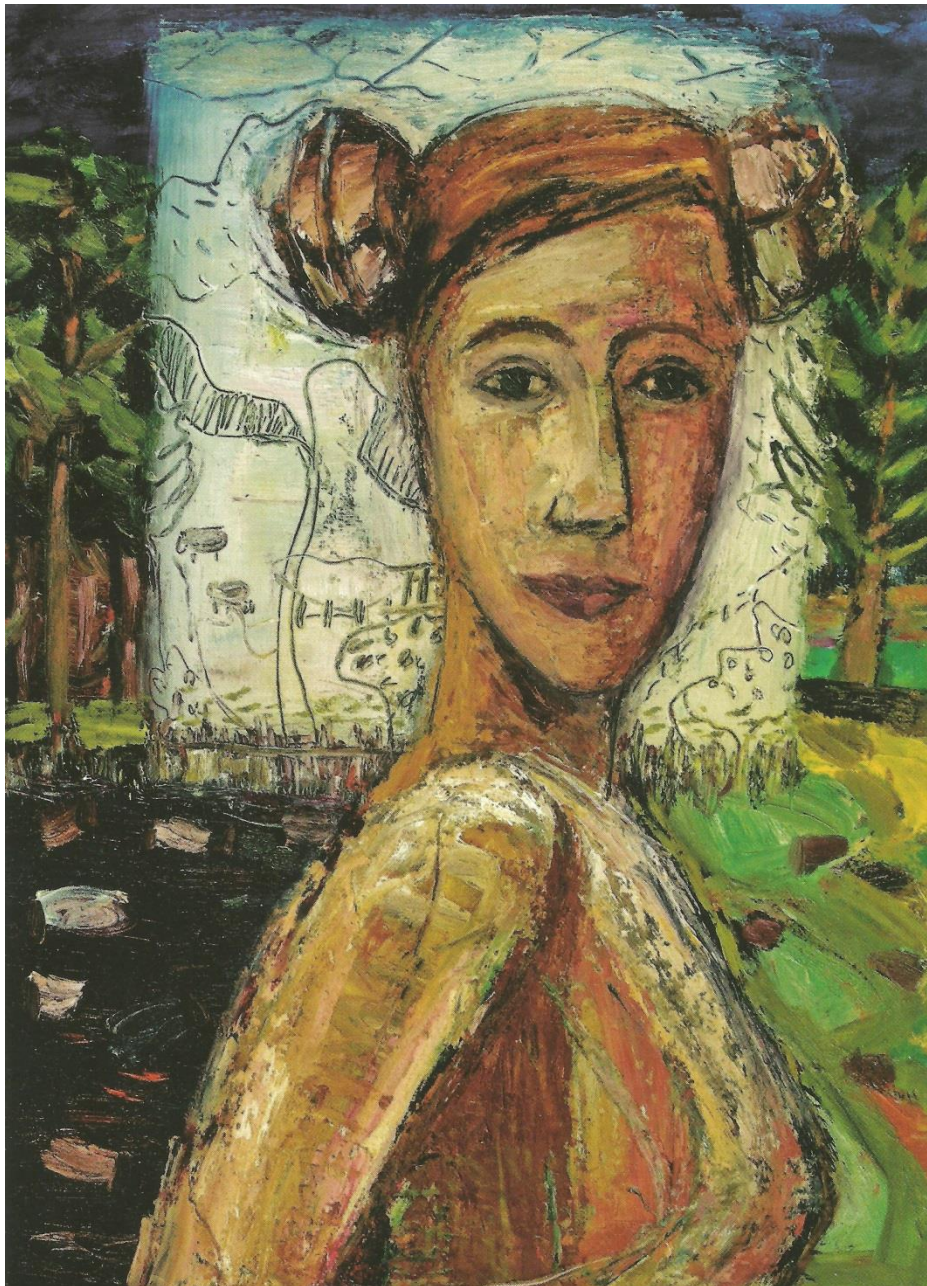
Lily, 2006, oil on canvas, 150 x 120 cm



Background Ties, 2006, oil on wood, 70 x 50 cm



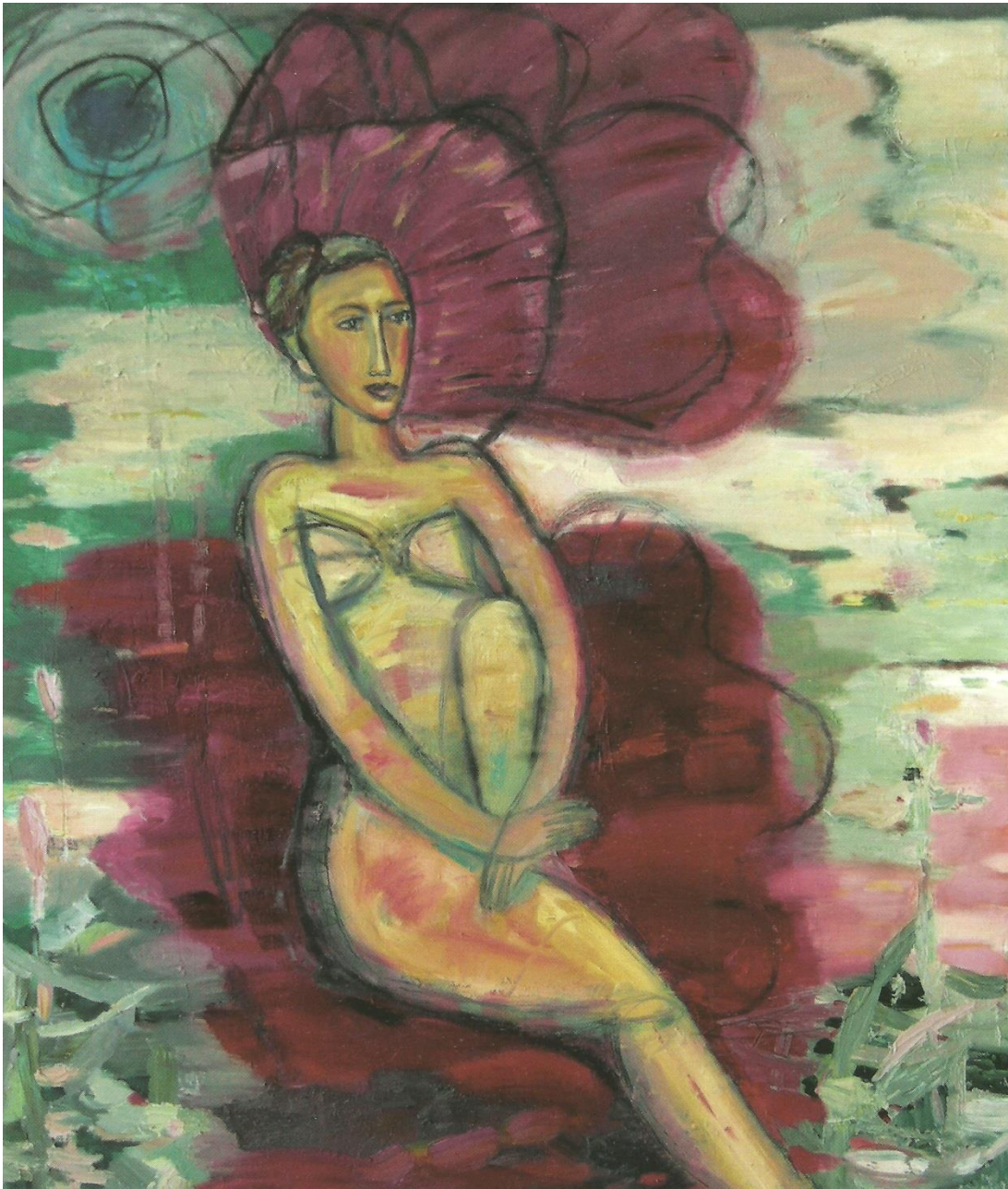
Then and There, 2006, oil on wood, 70 x 50 cm



Dancer's Tracks, 2006, oil on wood, 70 x 50 cm



Not Telling, 2006, oil on wood, 70 x 50 cm



Part of the Pattern II. 2006, oil on canvas, 150 x 120 cm



Maiden Chambers Series 1 – Back to Back, 2006, pastel on paper, 59.5 x 42 cm

Maiden Chambers Series 1 – Enclosed, 2006, pastel on paper, 59.5 x 42 cm

Margaret Hunter

Born in 1948 in Ayrshire, Scotland.

Studied at the Glasgow School of Art (1981-85) and under Professor Georg Baselitz at the Hochschule de Kuntse in Berlin. Lives and works in Berlin and Scotland.

Collections include The Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, The Scottish Arts Council, Strathclyde University, Glasgow, Robert Fleming & Co, Chelsea & Westminster Hospital, London, and many corporate collections in Germany.



Acknowledgements

Art First and Margaret Hunter would like to
thank Angela Weight for her fresh
introduction to the new work.

*My thanks and appreciation to Ingrid and
Harry Leuckert for their friendship and
generosity. They provided me with the
opportunity for an intensively creative
working period in naturals surroundings
steeped in history: a wonderful experience
that resulted in this body of work.*

*My thanks also to Alan Cairns and Robert Bell
for their technical assistance.*

MH

E-catalogue produced by Roger Webb

Photography: Sven Hoffman, Margaret Hunter

Text:: Angela Weight

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scans. The images may not therefore be a true rendition of the original work.

For definitive information or images, please consult Margaret Hunter through her website:

www.margaret-hunter.com