

Margaret Hunter

Scratching the Surface

Margaret Hunter - An Introduction

When a woman senses that there is a mythic dimension to something she is undertaking, that knowledge touches and inspires deep creative centres in her. Myths evoke feeling and imagination and touch on themes that are part of the human collective inheritance.

(Jean Shinoda Bolen, *Goddesses in Everywoman*, Harper and Row, 1984)

It is self-evident that Margaret Hunter is a woman and that it is through the vehicle of the female form that she explores her personal truth. Here I have said nothing and yet everything there is to be said about Hunter's art.

Hunter's personal experience is concerned with the boundaries of the individual in a culture not her own. Arriving in Berlin unable to speak German, she was thrown back upon herself, and it is in the examination of this

quality that we all discover who and what we are - in isolation what can we become? Living in a culture essentially alien, Hunter is currently working in a city which itself is being recreated in the dissolving duality of East and West. As a sculptor/painter, Hunter has also set herself a difficult creative task - to transcend traditional boundaries, to work with conviction and confidence in two quite different mediums, and dimensions. In this it is clear she has succeeded. Duality, then is commonplace in the artist's experience - and in

ours also. The balancing of apparently incompatible or opposing (external, or internal) forces is central to the nature of being human. Whatever its form or source, our experience of duality has a profound effect upon our sense of self, upon our inner selves. This personal (and collective) reality underlies the art of Margaret Hunter.

The human form was first sculpted some 20,000 years ago. From the Pyrenees to Siberia, statues were carved in stone, bone and ivory, or cut from the rock, and painted with red ochre. Some have signs scratched into them (lines, circles, spirals, zigzags, triangles, etc). These are amongst the oldest projections of human consciousness, the embodiment of our earliest perception of *meaning*-and they are all female. These so-called 'venus' or 'goddess' figurines have no masculine equivalents. We must suppose then that their symbolism transcended the specifics of gender. The female form embodied the essential mystery - life itself. From the beginning that mystery was conceived of as a duality - the

perceptible process and its supernatural source. Through the agency (the intercession) of the feminine, humankind sought to approach the hidden source of power.



Freidenau Series 1, 1994
Pastel on paper, 80 x 53 cm

These ancient figurines were the beginning of a rich archetypal tradition, expressed in divergent formal terms throughout history and across cultures, which acknowledges the

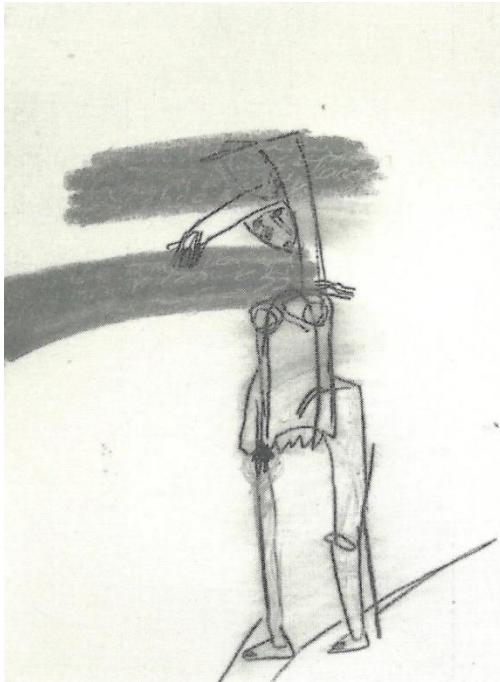
centrality of the feminine in revelation. In the West, however, the power of the feminine to reveal inner meaning has been rejected and forgotten in the domination of the masculine. The subordination of women as a sex is merely a reflection of a value system in which emotional truth, intuitive wisdom and instinctual self-confidence have been trivialised.

Drawn from her own consciousness and experience as a contemporary woman, Hunter's imagery is rooted in a tradition which began with the first mage-makers. Her themes are both constant and universal throughout the history of our kind. She, like the first artists, uses the female form to explore themes of profound relevance to us all. There are formal echoes in her sculpted and painted images of the earliest female figurines, and of the art of native cultures, gleaned on her visits to museum collections. They are an aid in her process of creating a direct and immediate vocabulary of form. The power of her images is testimony enough to the success of her

endeavour. The paring of form to its essentials, the marking of her figures with signs and symbols (reminiscent of tribal scarring) are the means by which she taps the power of archetypal imagery, and in so doing creates an art which strikes meaning at the deepest level of our consciousness.

These images are hard won, we sense that the wood does not easily give up its form. In the process of their making these sculptures become personages in their own right, entities which command attention and which seek confirmation from the artist, and from the viewer. The rawness of the making in **Lucie's Sister** (1994) is balanced by the vulnerability of the figure. It's tightly compacted form, with its protective/accepting gesture of the arms across the abdomen, is in contrast to the defiant stance of **Carrying the Arrow** (1994). Related in its defiance and certainty to the figure in the painting **Reach** (1994), the raised arm which brandishes the arrow carries the movement of the figure beyond the sculpted form. The purple/blue markings on **Lucie's**

Sister echo tribal markings - the symbols of identity and belonging, which ensure the protection of the guardians and ancestors. We may not understand their meaning, but we recognise their significance.



Louisenhof Series V, 1992
Pastel on paper, 80 x 53 cm
Private Collection

In her paintings, Hunter often scrapes back, reworks, in the effort to achieve clarity and remain true to her intuitive search for form. It is this activity no less than the shadowy presences which people the backgrounds of her paintings, which generates the sense of animation in her work. The character of the painted, scraped and scratched marks from which the images emerge, powerfully conveys a sense of movement, which in turn creates a strong emotional echo in the viewer. In **Crossing Paths** (1994), the formal device of curving the figure into an upward movement, is literally uplifting. We feel the transcendent nature of the image. Similarly in the same painting and also in **Continuation** (1994), the spiralling line not only carries movement, it also conveys the experiential nature of the image. The line is a metaphor for an experience. In the same way that in ritual, the re-enactment of an event (mythical or historical) invokes the symbolic power, the artist's line is the vehicle for inner meaning. In envisioning we may call up needs, strengths and qualities within ourselves.

In ancient and native cultures the spiral symbolises the sacred way, the approach to a dimension invisible to human senses. In Native American spirituality the power of a symbolic form is absorbed through the stomach, and the connection with spiritual power is via invisible threads tied to the human body. The spiralling line which envelopes the little figures 'within' the central figure of **Crossing Paths**, spins out into the world and draws back into itself the power of unseen forces.

The 'air' which surrounds Hunter's central figures is often peopled with past lives (the painting's and artist's), spirits, demons even, which may or may not be divisible from the self. Are they ancestral beings, voices of those who have trodden this path before, or are they from another plane of reality which co-exists (usually unseen) with our own? In some instances it seems clear that the ethereal being is an aspect of the central figure as in **Lines of Continuity II** (1994), in which the shadow-self is conjoined to the figure. The vertical lines which run up and down the figure read almost

like musical staves, symbolic of the harmony which is achieved when we draw the dual aspects of the self together.

With her consummated skill as an artist, Hunter achieves a balance of form and colour, which draws together and holds the elements within each work. But this process is symbolic of a deeper search known to us all. To achieve balance and unity within the self we must also draw together all the threads of our experience. As Hunter shows us, the process is fraught with danger. In the painting **In Between** (1994) the figure seems to be almost overcome by the symbolic forms of opposing forces. Crushed between two half spheres, a maelstrom of line/energy whirls around the figure.

But in the singing green triangle which hovers above, there is a sign of hope and of salvation. In **Together Person** (1994) Hunter has created a powerful evocation of what can be achieved. Here the figure holds in balance the two half spheres, the yin and yang of experience. But

are the two incomplete forms being drawn together or held apart. One senses that the edge of the painting restrains the power of the image, contains it, prevents it from spilling out into the (our) surrounding world.

In one of her most poignant images, Hunter provides in **Quiet Voice** (1994) the answer to the question of how we might achieve the sought-after balance in our lives. The painting

resonates with the meaning drawn from the passage in Kings 14, 11 in which it is revealed that the power of God is not in the tempest, earthquake or fire, but is rather in the still quiet voice that follows. This surely is the voice of intuition the inner voice of the true self.

Lynne Green
September 1994

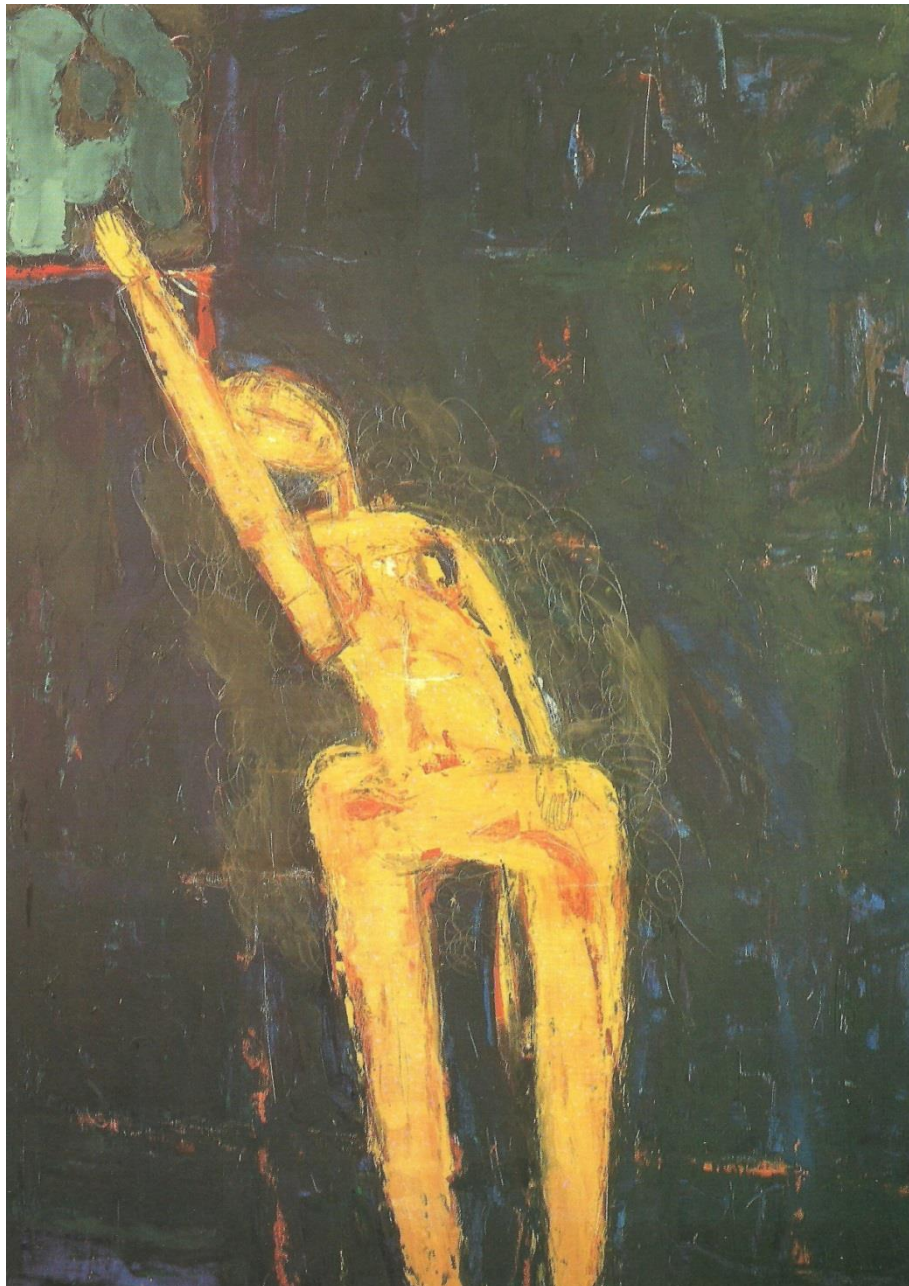
Reach

1994

oil on wood

153 x 112 cm

Private Collection





Continuation

1994
acrylic and oil on paper
157 x 99 cm

Private Collection



Quiet Voice

1994
acrylic and oil on paper
130 x 125 cm

Lines of Continuity II

1994

oil on wood

153 x 112 cm

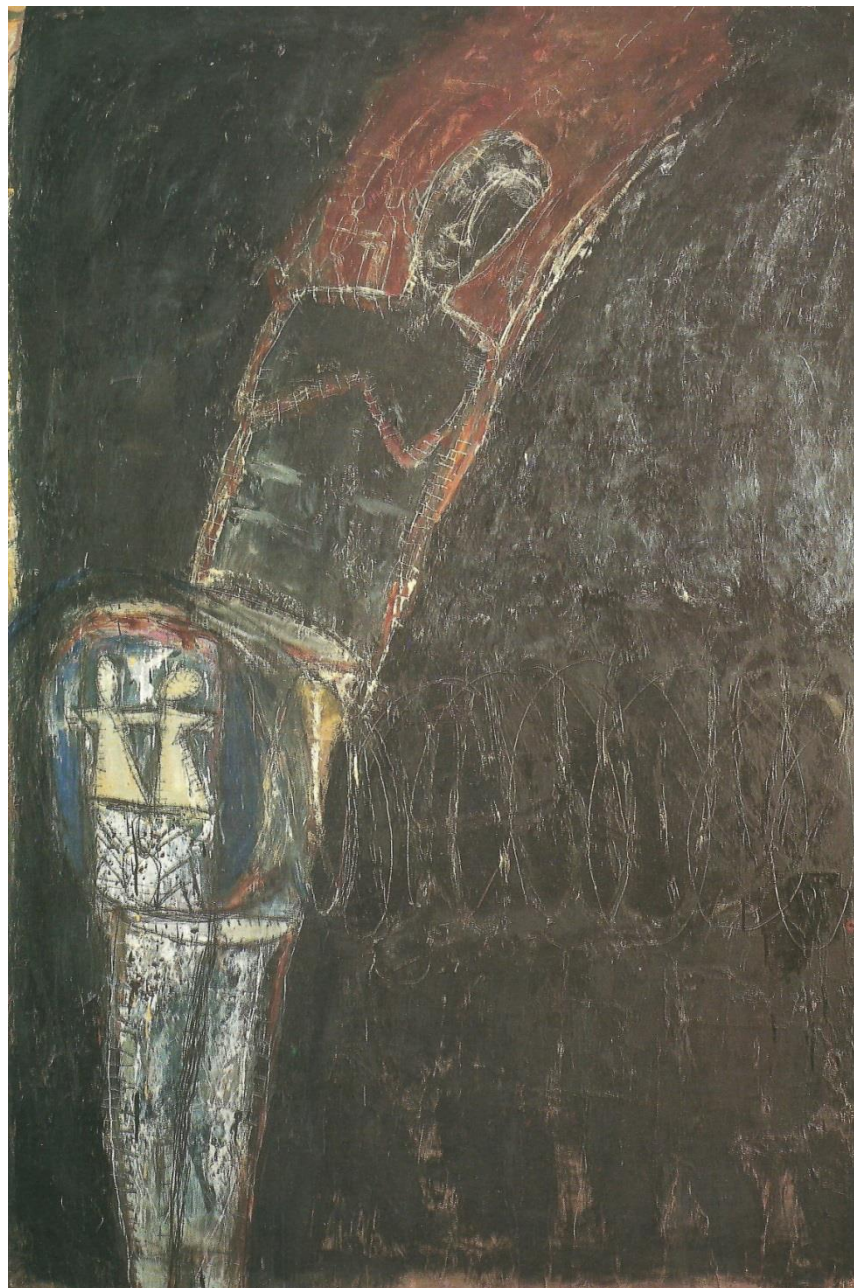


Crossing Paths

1994

oil on wood

183 x 123 cm



Passing Friends

1994

oil on wood

153 x 112 cm

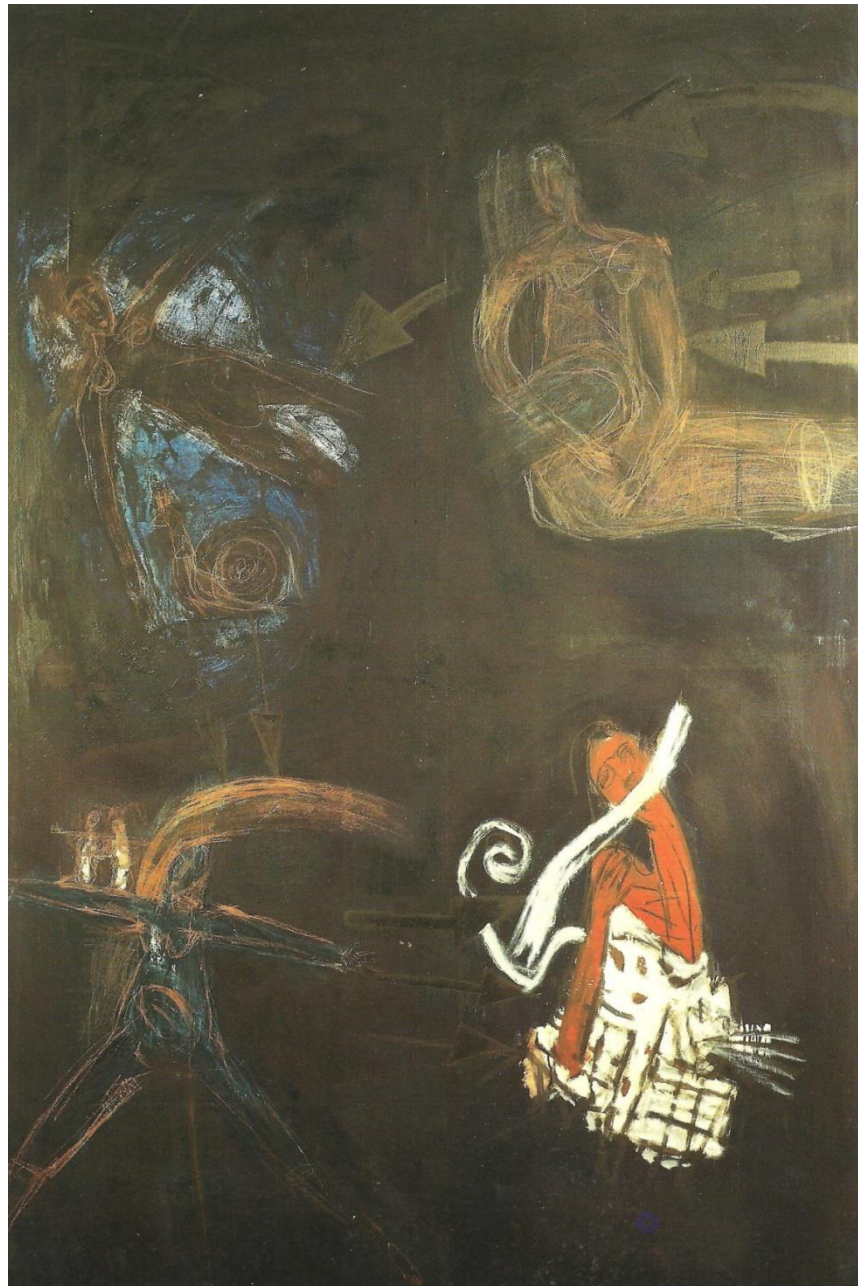


Old Stories – Fading Away

1993

oil on canvas

180 x 120 cm

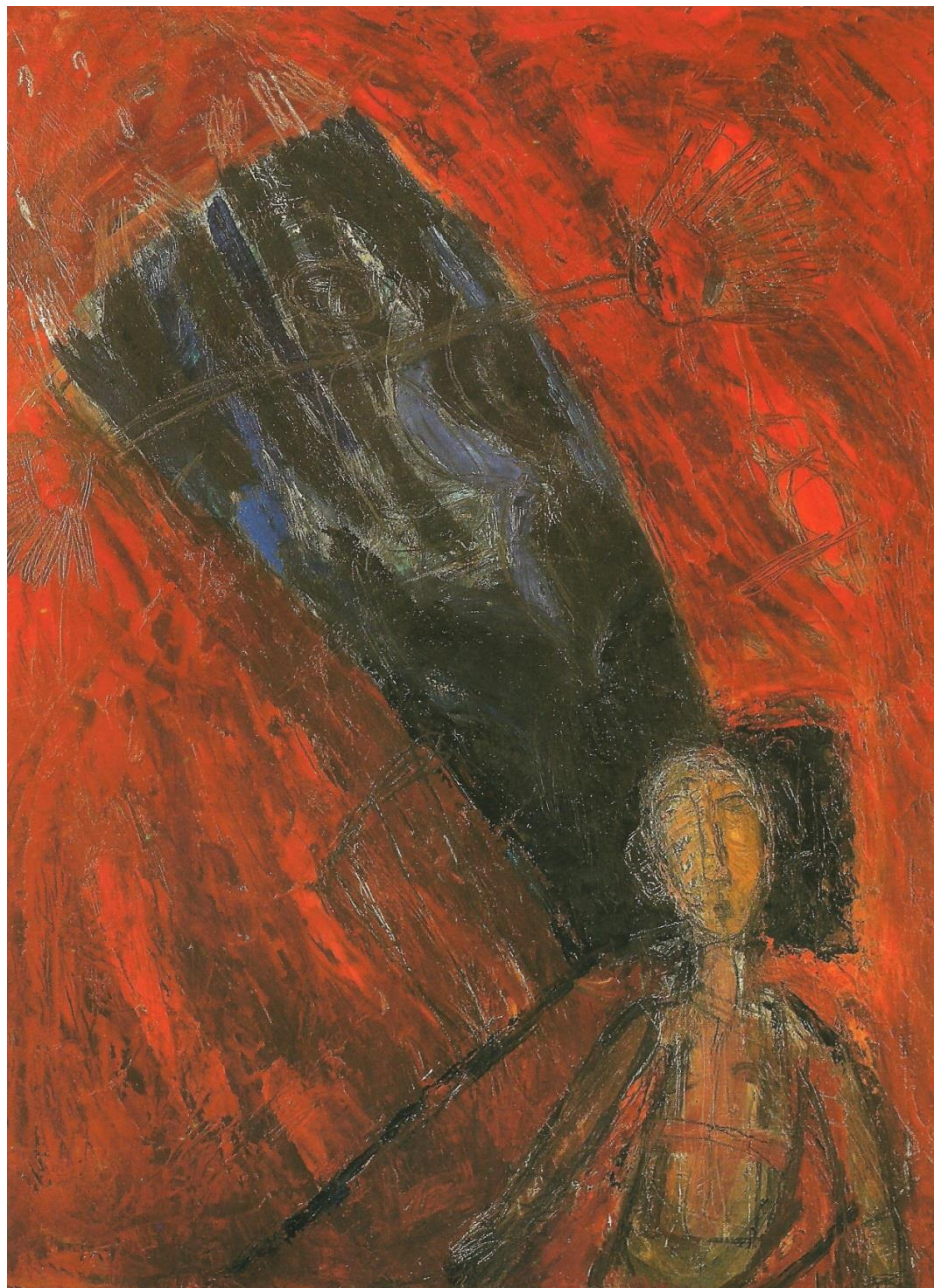


Anticipation

1994

oil on wood

120 x 95 cm





Telling

1994

pastel on paper

80 x 53 cm

Private Collection



Passing On

1994

pastel on paper

80 x 53 cm

Friedenau Series II

1994

pastel on paper

80 x 53 cm

Private Collection

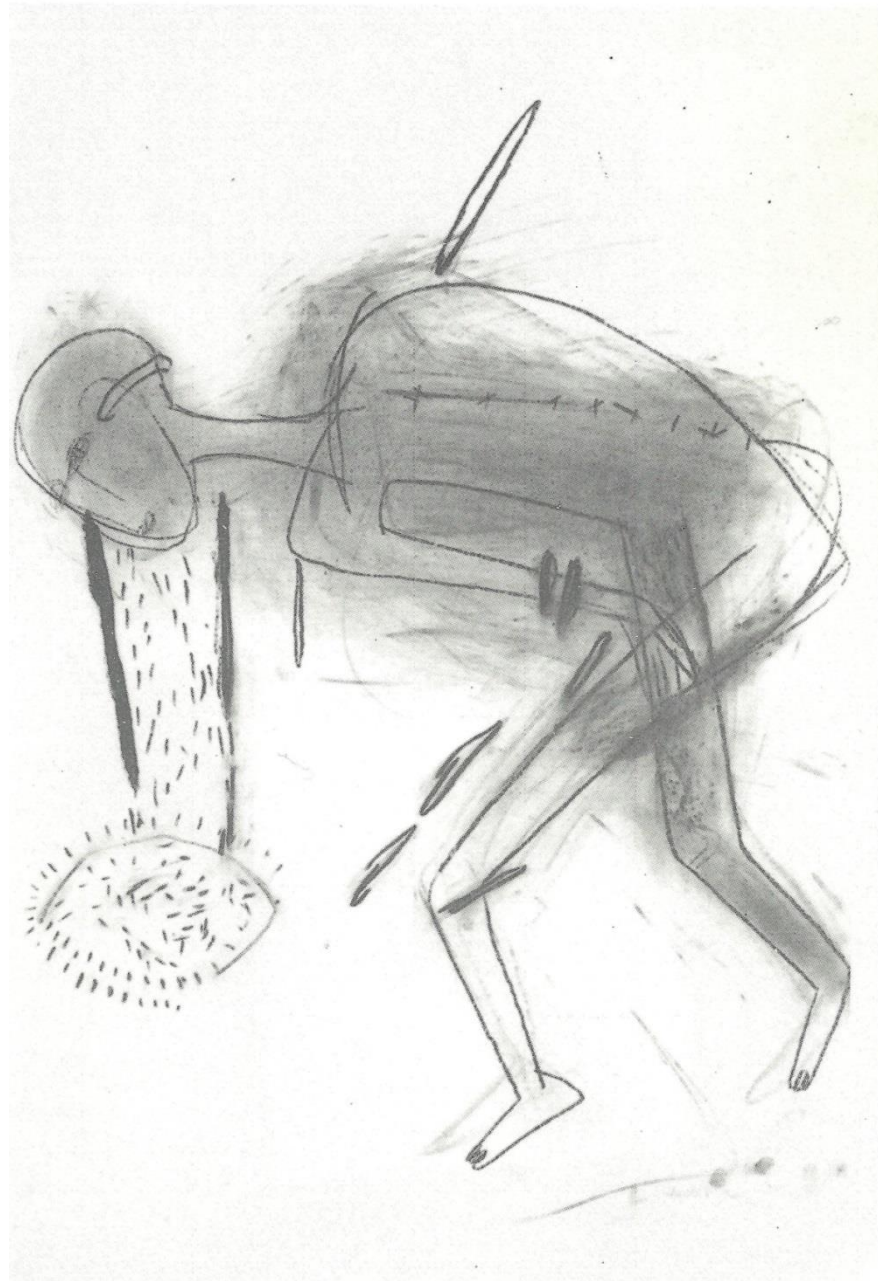


Figure with Torch

1994

oil on wood

140 x 105 cm

Private Collection



Together Person

1994
oil on wood
89 x 63 cm



Balance

1994
oil and wax on wood
153 x 112 cm



In Between

1994

oil on canvas

180 x 120 cm

Private Collection





The Binding

1994

wood and copper

96 x 65 cm

Public Collection



Holding Together

1994
wood, copper and lead
82 x 27 cm

Public Collection



Lucie's Sister

1994
wood and oil paint
106 x 30 cm

Private Collection



Kauf und Bauch

1994
wood and oil paint
186 x 32 cm



Zig-Zag Figure

1994
wood, bronze and steel
178 x 45 cm
Private Collection



Carrying the Arrow

1994

wood, copper and steel

203 x 120 cm

Public Collection

This e-catalogue has been produced using images from various sources including computer 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

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