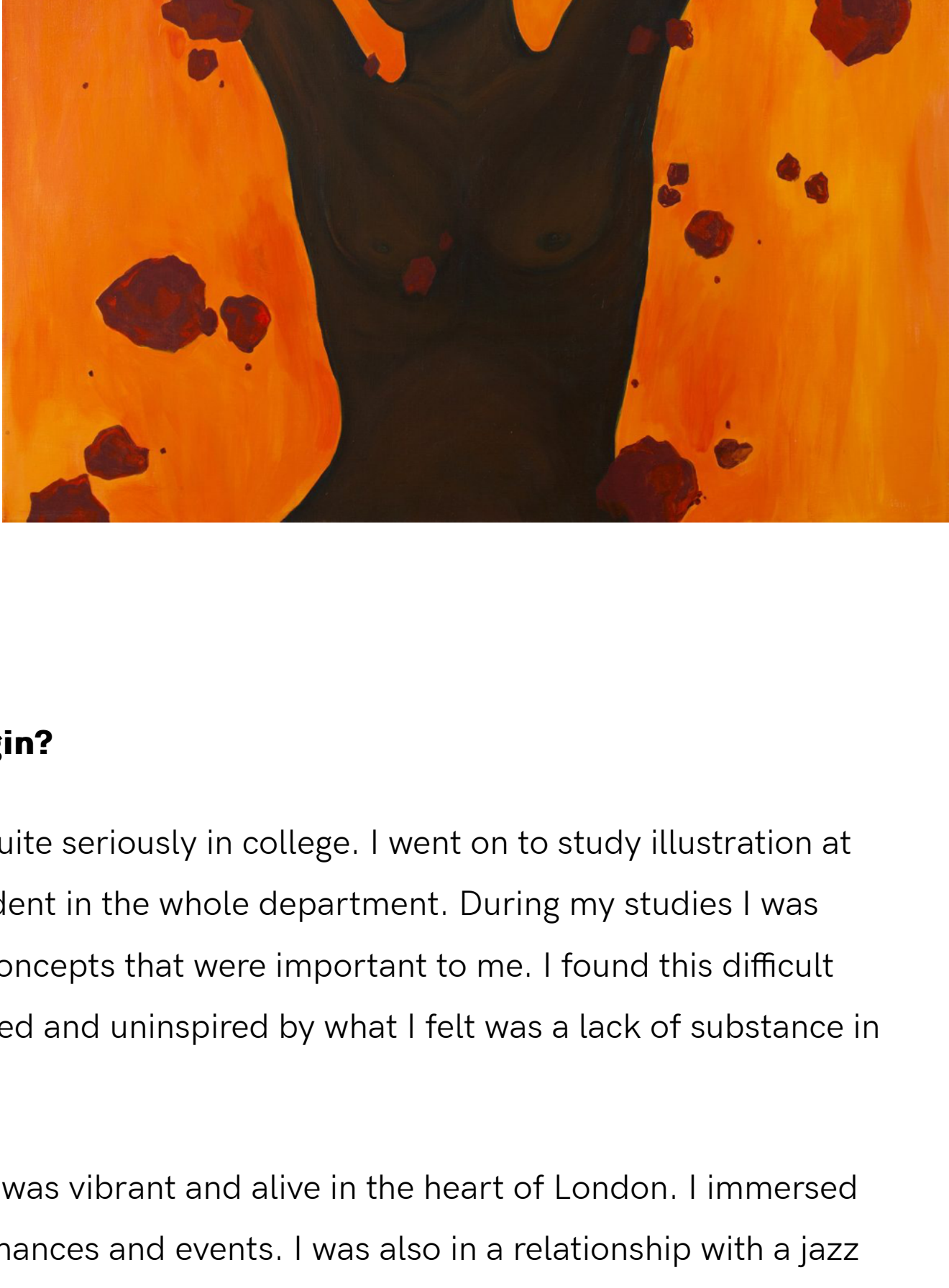
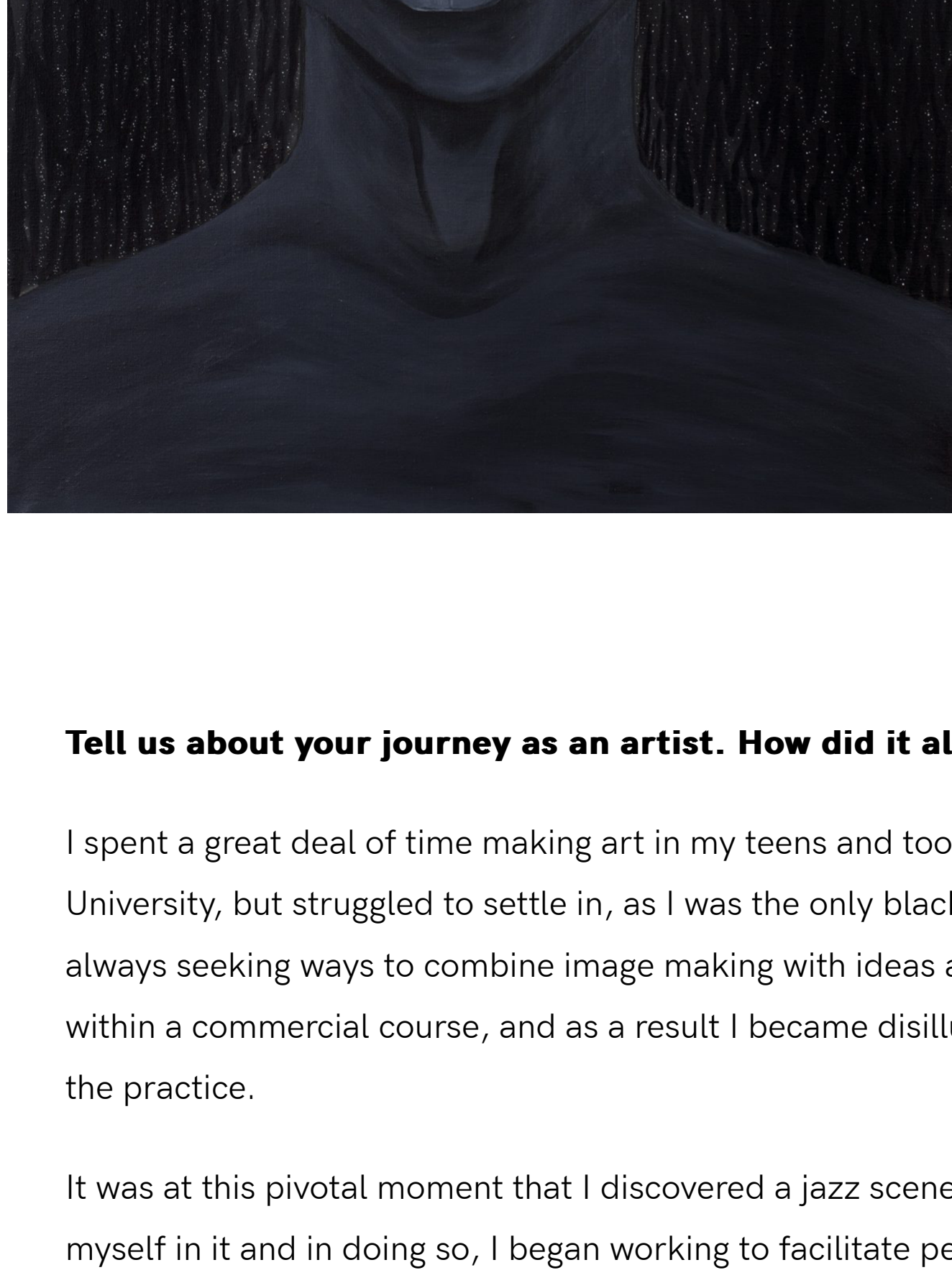


## ART DANIELA YOHANNES

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**Since the beginning of time, mankind has searched for answers to the plethora of existential questions. In the quest for answers we have looked inwards to the subconscious and outwards to the cosmos – Daniela Yohannes's work seems to be the manifestation of what would happen if a philosopher traded their pen for a paintbrush. Her striking work deals mostly with themes of 'consciousness and ancestry, the ethereal nature of the cosmos and plurality of the individual'.**



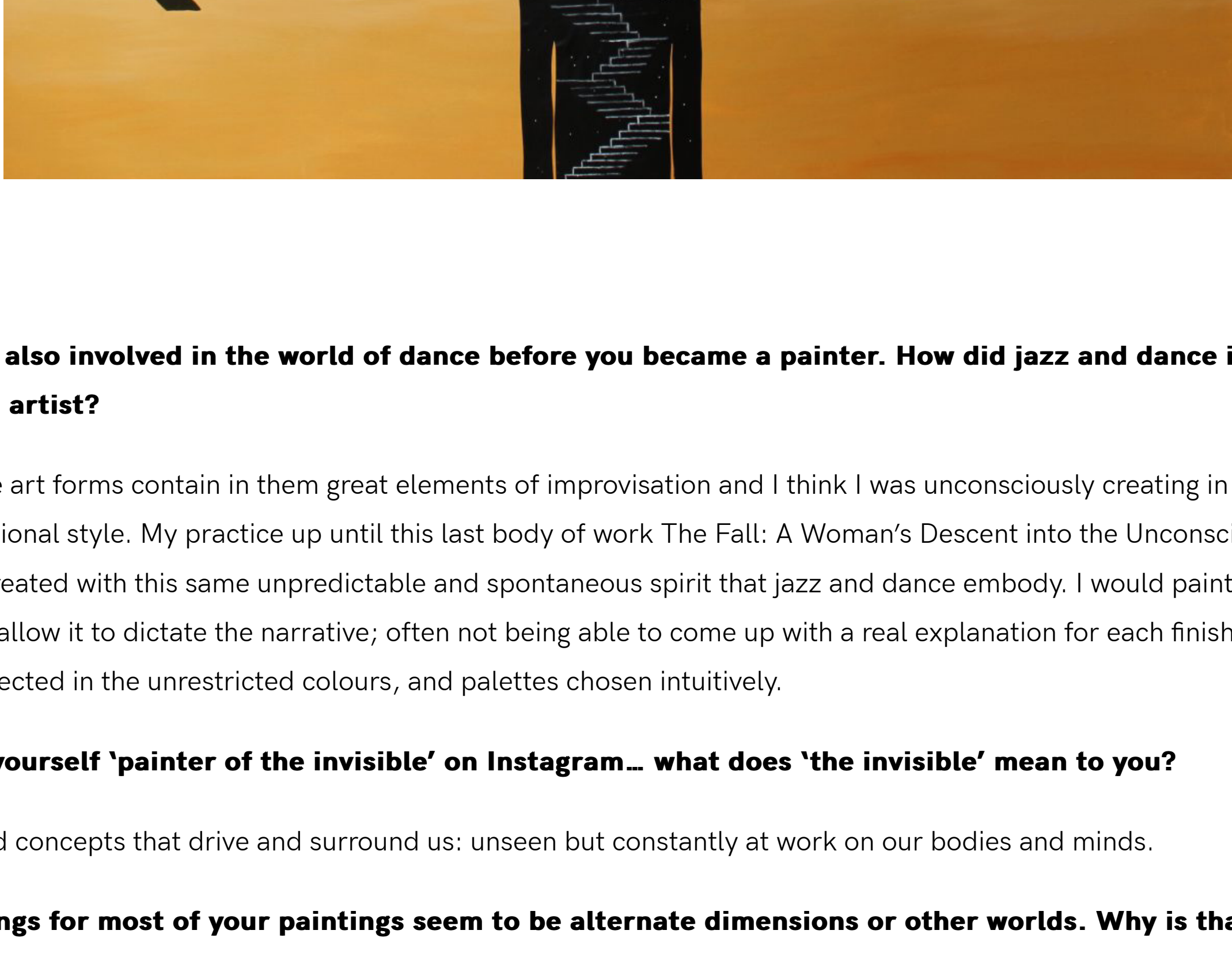
#### Tell us about your journey as an artist. How did it all begin?

I spent a great deal of time making art in my teens and took it quite seriously in college. I went on to study illustration at University, but struggled to settle in, as I was the only black student in the whole department. During my studies I was always seeking ways to combine image making with ideas and concepts that were important to me. I found this difficult within a commercial course, and as a result I became disillusioned and uninspired by what I felt was a lack of substance in the practice.

It was at this pivotal moment that I discovered a jazz scene that was vibrant and alive in the heart of London. I immersed myself in it and in doing so, I began working to facilitate performances and events. I was also in a relationship with a jazz musician and learnt a great deal from him about the music and its history. I witnessed a whole new generation of musicians, both European and American. At the time I had no idea what I was doing, hanging out in jazz clubs and absorbing all this music. I just knew I loved it and the feeling it gave me; that feeling of being a part of a community, a sense of belonging and the free, radical nature of music and lifestyle.

I came back to image making, and began creating album covers and promotional content for jazz groups, until my relationship ended and I needed to remove myself from this very intimate scene. In 2010, I was offered an artist residency in Thailand. Those three solitary months were spent in a depression that transformed into a rebirth of sorts. I consider this the beginning of my practice.

All those years spent listening to the music and seeing how these musicians approached it became my unconventional education. I learnt about risk, reward and improvisation. I continued to be close to the music and spent many years travelling with jazz pianist Keith Jarrett. He led me deeper into music, introduced me to a world of literature, art, esoteric concepts, silence and solitude that continue to penetrate my life and art. Those 10 years spent with Keith taught me the importance of doing the work – and the power and strength of intuition.



#### You were also involved in the world of dance before you became a painter. How did jazz and dance influence you as an artist?

Both these art forms contain in them great elements of improvisation and I think I was unconsciously creating in the same improvisational style. My practice up until this last body of work *The Fall: A Woman's Descent into the Unconscious* have all been created with this same unpredictable and spontaneous spirit that jazz and dance embody. I would paint the figure first, then allow it to dictate the narrative; often not being able to come up with a real explanation for each finished piece. This is reflected in the unrestricted colours, and palettes chosen intuitively.

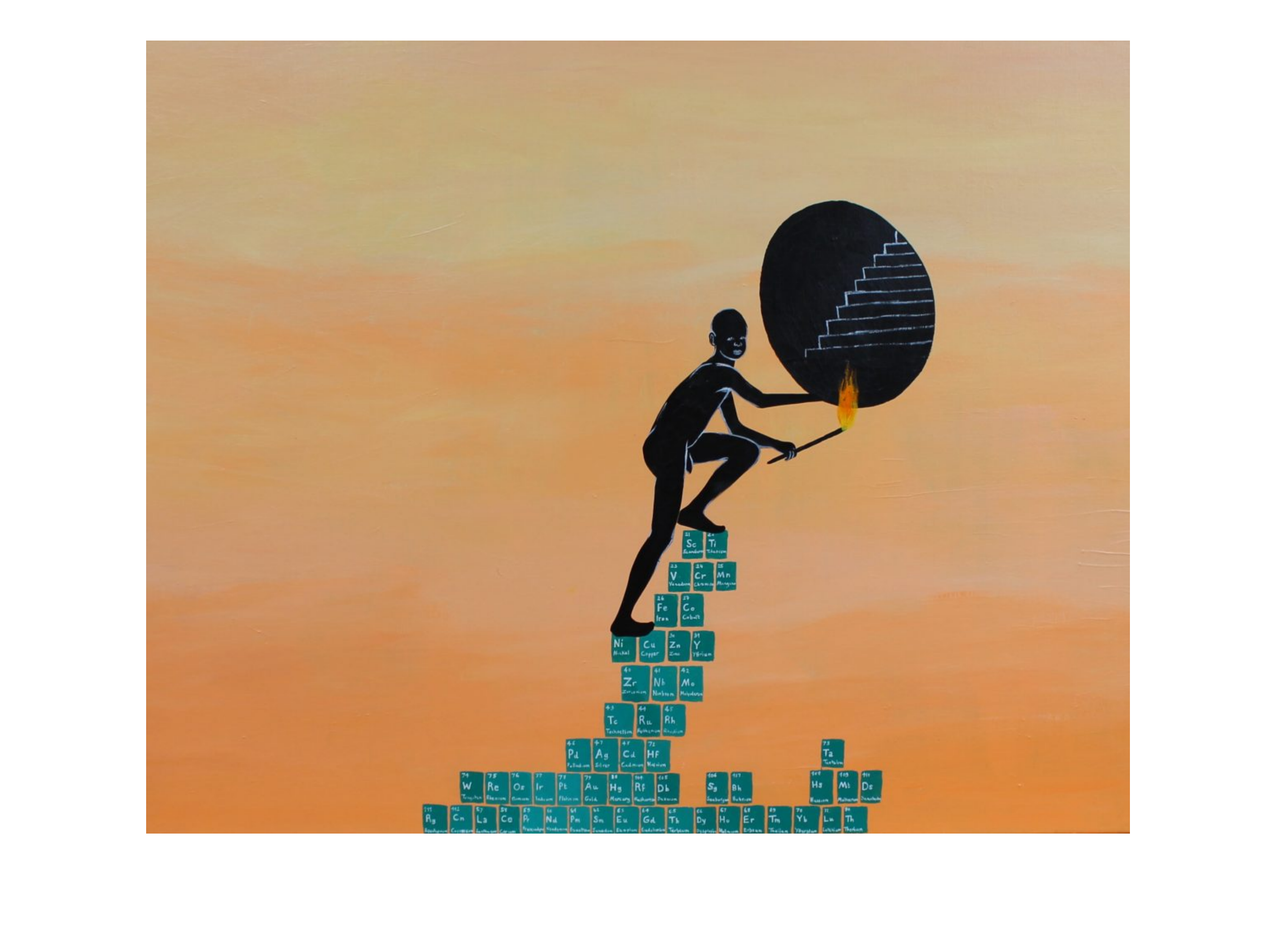
#### You call yourself 'painter of the invisible' on Instagram... what does 'the invisible' mean to you?

Forces and concepts that drive and surround us: unseen but constantly at work on our bodies and minds.

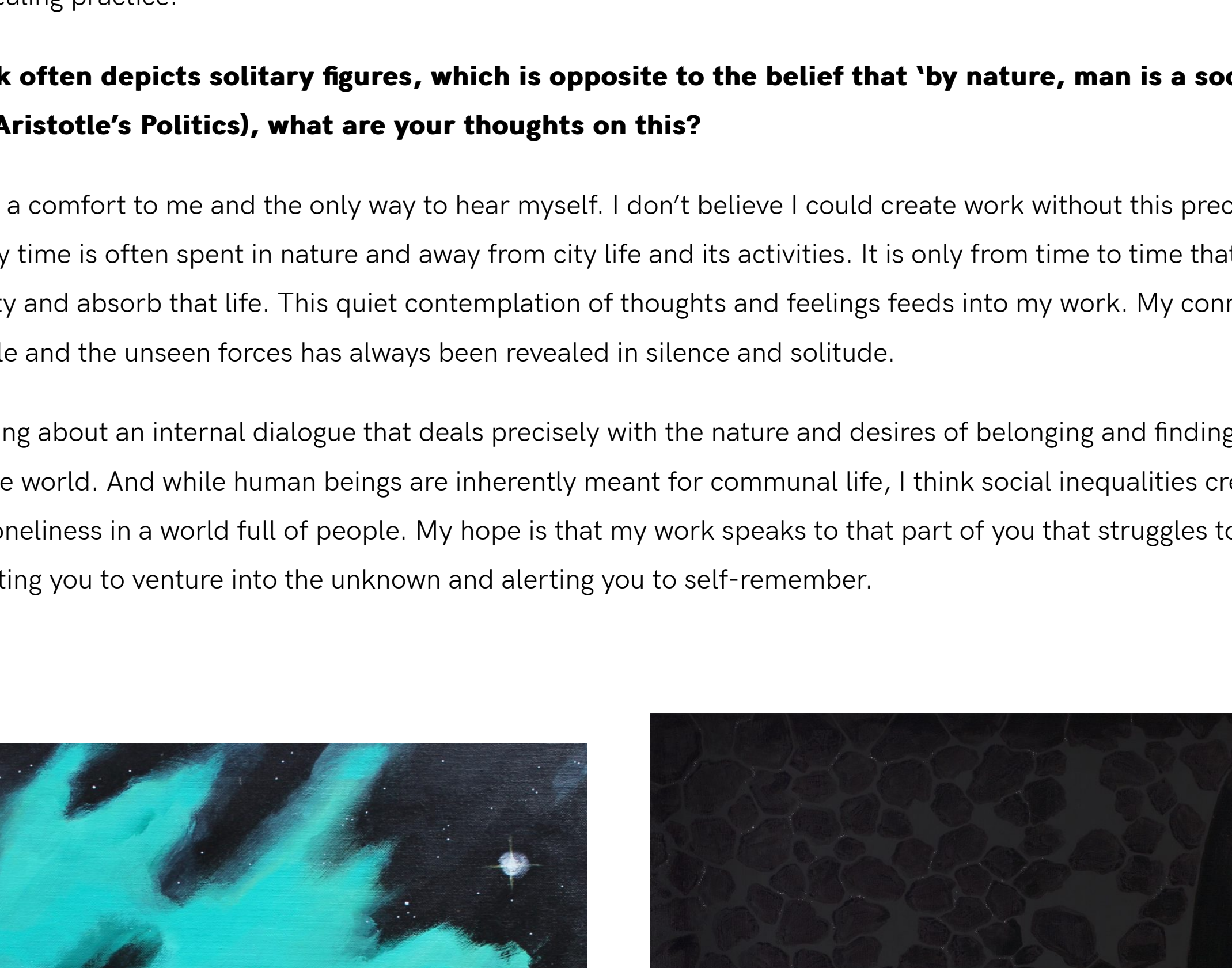
#### The settings for most of your paintings seem to be alternate dimensions or other worlds. Why is that?

For a long time I didn't continuously pay much attention to this aspect of my work. However, now that I have a new sense of focus and direction, I have come to understand that at the heart of my work I am interested in examining how we identify with our surroundings, environment and each other. How we create roots in unexpected places. What experiences shape those identities, and how you can be made to feel like you don't belong in a place that you deeply connect with as home. Also how by embracing a non-identity you can access true freedom.

I am the outcome of multiple identities. There are many places I can call 'home' and in all of these places I have attempted to establish roots. However, my experiences have exposed me to the notion of 'other'. I grew up feeling hostilities that caused me to want to flee. So I contemplated the stars and imagined a personal utopia – an escape – seeking alternative worlds and spaces that can offer me sanctuary. I often paint this lone figure in semi-abstract space as a projection of my rejection and simultaneous navigation of struggles and identities.



#### 'I often paint this lone figure in semi-abstract space as a projection of my rejection and simultaneous navigation of struggles and identities.'



#### Your work deals with dreams and the subconscious, which you describe as 'a place of magic, transformation and rebirth'. Can you explain what role this plays in the creation of your artworks?

I deeply believe in the important connection between mind, body, soul, spirit and heart. In my work I consult my subconscious and dreams as a means to process those buried feelings: the work becomes a process from which I can access those dominant emotions and get insight. It is not an easy pursuit, but I aim to give this aspect of my life much importance and consideration. It is a kind of silent teacher guiding me. By doing this work I have been able to resolve personal health issues, fears and trauma. Therefore art is a necessary healing practice.

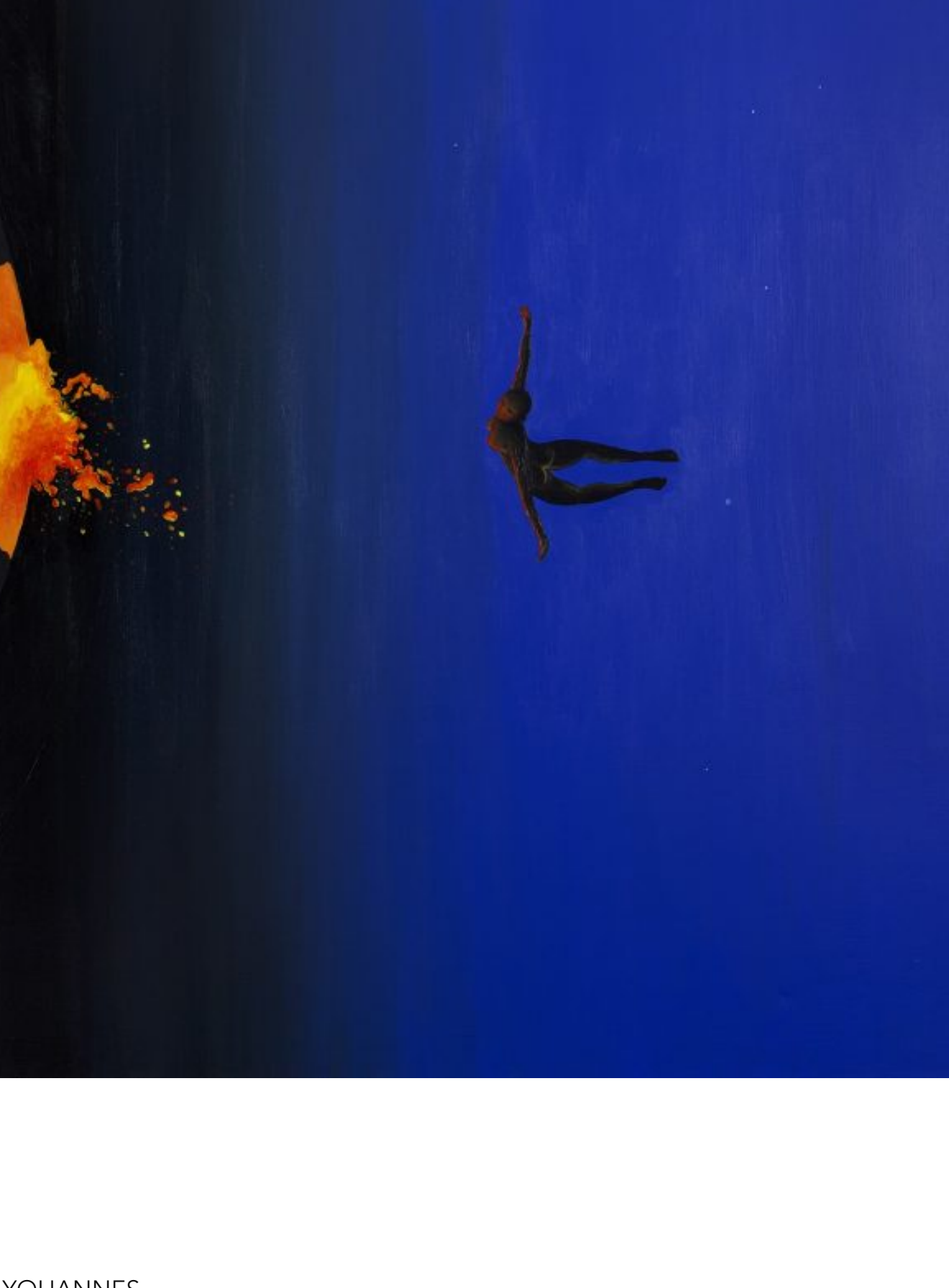
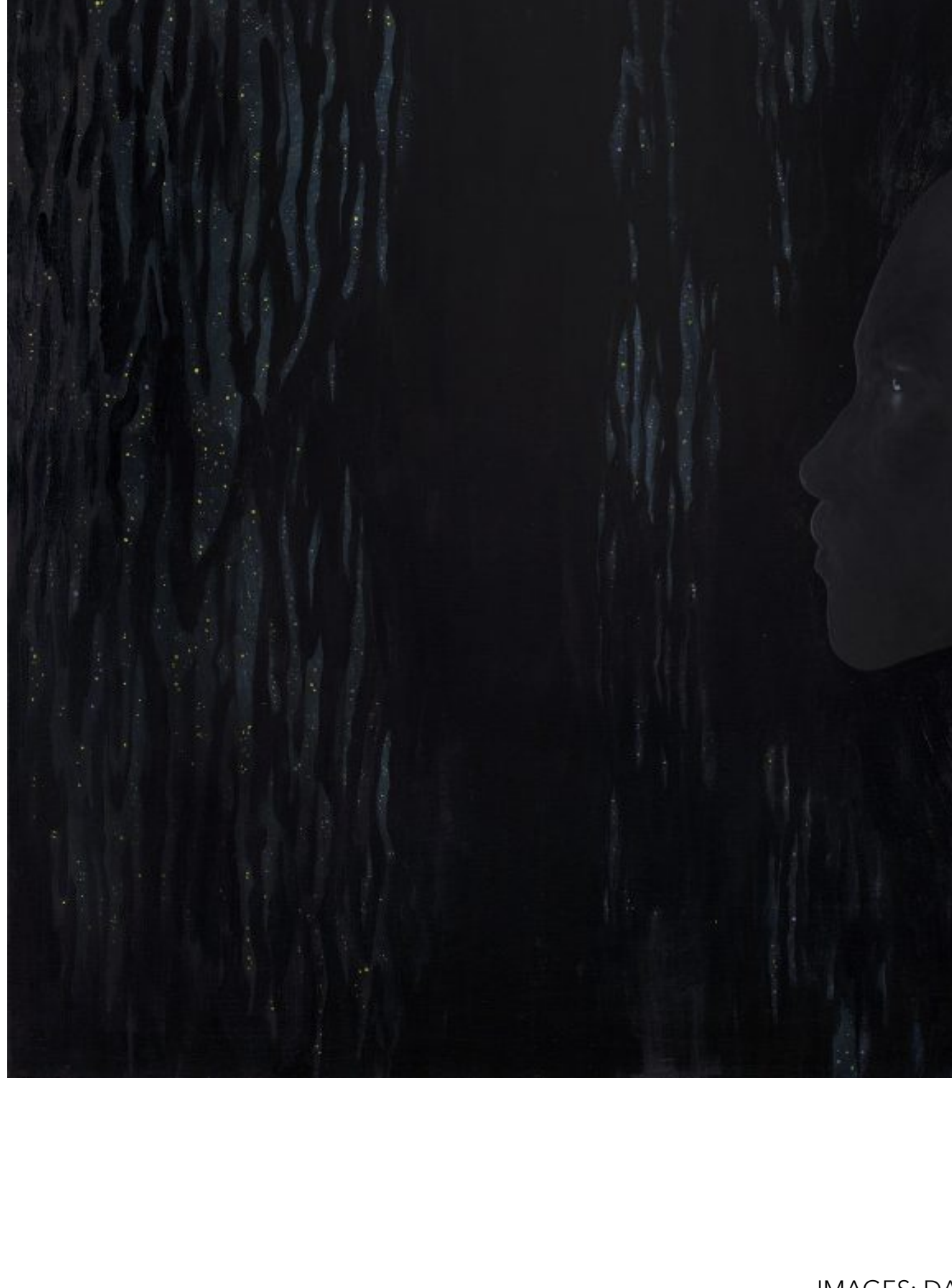
#### And you also touch on this exploration of the subconscious leading you to a 'deeply personal healing narrative'. Can you elaborate?

The experiences I accumulated and absorbed in my life began to display their effects on my mind and body. Social inequality played its part in creating that disconnected and 'alien-life' feeling. I'm trying to be present and listen to my deeper self and making art from this emotional pandemonium. In doing so I resolve a lot of this external pollution: it is an ongoing healing practice.

#### Your work often depicts solitary figures, which is opposite to the belief that 'by nature, man is a social animal' (Aristotle's Politics), what are your thoughts on this?

Solitude is a comfort to me and the only way to hear myself. I don't believe I could create work without this precious silence. My time is often spent in nature and away from city life and its activities. It is only from time to time that I venture into the city and absorb that life. This quiet contemplation of thoughts and feelings feeds into my work. My connection to the invisible and the unseen forces has always been revealed in silence and solitude.

I am painting about an internal dialogue that deals precisely with the nature and desires of belonging and finding one's place in the world. And while human beings are inherently meant for communal life, I think social inequalities create a sense of loneliness in a world full of people. My hope is that my work speaks to that part of you that struggles to find a place; inviting you to venture into the unknown and alerting you to self-remember.



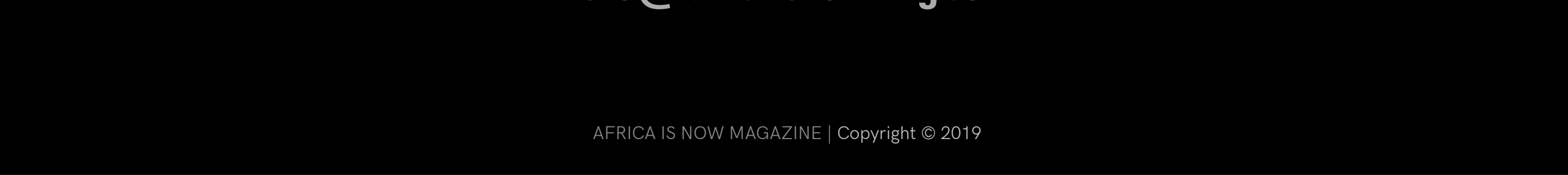
#### 'When I first started out, I mixed collage and painting techniques by painting over white faces in beauty magazines with black paint. Subconsciously there was something cathartic about that. Purposefully projecting blackness to elevate blackness.'

#### You tend to use very dark colours for all the human figures in your work, what's the symbolism here?

I think there are many meanings one can draw from the dark figures. 'Black' as a colour has come to mean so many different things over the ages. When I first started out, I mixed collage and painting techniques by painting over white faces in beauty magazines with black paint. Subconsciously there was something cathartic about that. Purposefully projecting blackness to elevate blackness. As the work developed, more layers of meaning arose. Black became the primordial darkness; a representation of the void and the figures amidst the bright colours became kind of black holes; drawing the viewer to them. In the same way that a black hole's gravitational field is so intense that no matter or radiation can escape, so the gaze is held by the dark figure.

#### Tell us more about how your film (ATOPIAS, I Have Left that Dark Cave Forever, My Body has Blended with Hers) came about and the difficulties or joys of creating a film versus painting?

Exploring film has really come about as a natural progression. It is an extension of my painting practice. I wanted to bring my paintings to life and make work with movement and narrative. The shift of role from author to the subject, in some ways looped back to my dance practice, as I became the performer as well as the artist in my own work. I experienced the physical burden of creating in a different and very visceral way.



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