



Over a passage of time
Au fils du temps
Aquarelles
by Subhash Awchat

Over a passage of time
Au fils du temps
Aquarelles
by Subhash Awchat



art & soul

12th Oct-15th Nov 2022

Over a passage of time Au fils du temps Aquarelles by Subhash Awchat

What happens when you search solitude within the construct of an artistic practice? Subhash Awchat a painter and if we suppose a writer proposes reflections of the self in watercolours explaining solitude as a material visible construct. I say if I suppose a writer because he wrote a column in a Marathi newspaper each week detailing the machinations of his mind as an artist. We sit discussing his latest oeuvre of watercolours in a housing project for Maharashtrian writers. He quickly slips into near history in a voice that holds emotions. I am witnessing as an art writer what determines contemporaneity of culture in the city where I was born. Our conversations have a context, I am Bihari - though from privilege, cosmopolitan and easily unrecognisable for my regional identity. But since childhood whenever I have to state where I came from in a city to which my grandfather migrated to and I was born - it always raises stares, questions and stereotypes which I allay with my mother's Maharashtrian heritage even though her family has been in Bihar since the 18th century, sometimes my neighbourhood in Bombay or the cosmopolitan nature of my family's marital decisions. To interview a painter regarded as what young artists in art schools across Maharashtra identify as a painter, an artist that made them make a decisive career decision to pursue art and an artist that reached them in Yeotmal, Chandrapur, Ichalkaranji and Islampur, for sure speaks of a privilege I now hold in this essay.

Why is that so? Why is Subhash Awchat prized as the artist of India's second largest state by the populace? Why do I feel an inclusion within the popular idea of culture, with my host culture, as a writer of this essay a privilege? Subhash Awchat has designed 7000 jackets of books published in Marathi. If you read in Marathi you have encountered his visual vocabulary. You know his strokes, you know his palette and the way with which he treats colour. He is the artist of my people, the people I live among. It doesn't surprise me that his column in a popular Marathi newspaper is well subscribed. Marathi as a language has a rich repository of literature but the intrigue exists in the passion to translate books from other languages to Marathi and publish for eager readers. One that sustains such publishing practices economically. You can encounter Gilles Deleuze, Jose Saramago, Gertrude Stein and John Berger in Marathi. Translations not intended at a market but the need to read and change a society aware of the significance of its language holds as a catalyst of modernity. Mahatma Jyotibha Phule through his writings proposed the idea of modernity much before similar deliberations in the occident and Dr. BR Ambedkar sought a constitutional architecture for equity in a nation riddled with caste. Both hailed from Maharashtra, a land conducive to intellectual change. Art History in our art schools in Maharashtra does let students in Sangli know of the 'Oath of Horatii' by Jacques Louis David which hangs at the Louvre through efforts of this tradition of translation. I recently witnessed a friend identify paintings at a distance at the Louvre even though my privilege of an English education did not allow or inform.

Subhash Awchat holds a unique privilege within the context of contemporary art history less discussed and investigated. We stand at a time where our memories hold a past that does not critically examine the recent

decades that precede us. We are embarrassed of the fashion, music and the movies that define a decade of great confusion. The 1990s released India from the cloak of a stagnating economy loosely defined as socialism. The 80s were a lost decade of turmoil, bureaucratic intrigue and a failing idea of India. Artists like Subhash emerged at the end of an era of pessimism. Subhash was designing the jackets and typesetting the publications of the Dalit Panthers and in his art making the 'Hamal' or the porter his muse. He opened his show romanticising the image of the subaltern man, it was beautiful, it was decorative. Why so?

Bal Thackeray, a cartoonist and the son of a Marathi playwright, became the voice of the pushback of marginalisation of a people ignored by a cosmopolitan culture Naipaul described as a mimicry of colonial tropes. Vijay Tendulkar in his plays had been discussing gender and political violence and thus became the conscience of the cultural elite who were engrossed in opposing ideologies as well the tumultuous 1990s where we suffered bouts of communal violence and division. We were in an immense flux culturally, politically and economically. India had liberalised, we had cable tv, we had just got to know the internet. Modernism was representative of the old order. I had just drunk my first Coca Cola and we could buy Japanese cars with air-conditioning. The upper middle class found jobs in foreign corporations that were selling us material goods and dreams of participation in a global world order. Awchat emerges as an artist at this moment.

His stories are intimate; they revolve around his deep intimacies with Marathi writers, Bal Thackeray's views on the Bombay School of Art, friendships he held with Narayan Shridhar Bendre and KK Hebbar. The moments of success and journeys into the interior of Maharashtra with Sharad Pawar who would remember the names of a million or more constituents, eat in homes in villages only Pawar knew the way to and directions that confused his security detail. What it meant to be among the people. He was the painter to the resurrection of a people who were asserting their place in politics through the actions of Bal Thackeray and Sharad Pawar and we became Mumbai from Bombay.

Much of these happenings have been ignored by the society I come from. They inhabit a safe space of privilege called South Bombay. But Awchat infiltrated their collections and circles. He came from the applied arts and was not a trained painter from the Sir JJ School of Art. He was not restricted to a school or an aesthetic agenda that he had to play out in his works to prove his mettle as an artist. Rather the act of being an artist enticed him. A multifaceted technique and aesthetic defined his practice. You see him work with landscapes, portraits and abstracts - all of them have poetic titles.

We now face an artist with age . Loneliness is a facet of time. The pandemic allowed us to face our interiority with great intimacy . Awchat was left alone without access to his acrylics or his canvases. A pad of watercolour paper was all that he had access to. A pad gifted to his grandson and for colours he had basic watercolours that were fabricated here in India. Tired of marathon calls and attempts to escape the quarantine he began painting watercolours for the first time. These were landscapes he had sitting somewhere in his mind. The Lebanese artist Etel Adnan wrote poetry of deep detachment, pain that is inherent in the nihilism of Levantine Politics. Syria , Lebanon and Palestine are lands divided by religion , race and at times language to suit the interests of the great powers. These conflicts have a deep impact on the lives of people who author poetry , art and cinema. Her landscapes may seem childlike but they are intense witnesses of both nostalgia and happiness one imagines of the land to which they were born. Watercolour is a medium that needs great dexterity. The command on colour and form-forming is urgent when the brush touches the paper you need to draw with water or the images turn to smudges. Awchat displayed much ability in handling colour and form. He changed his palette.

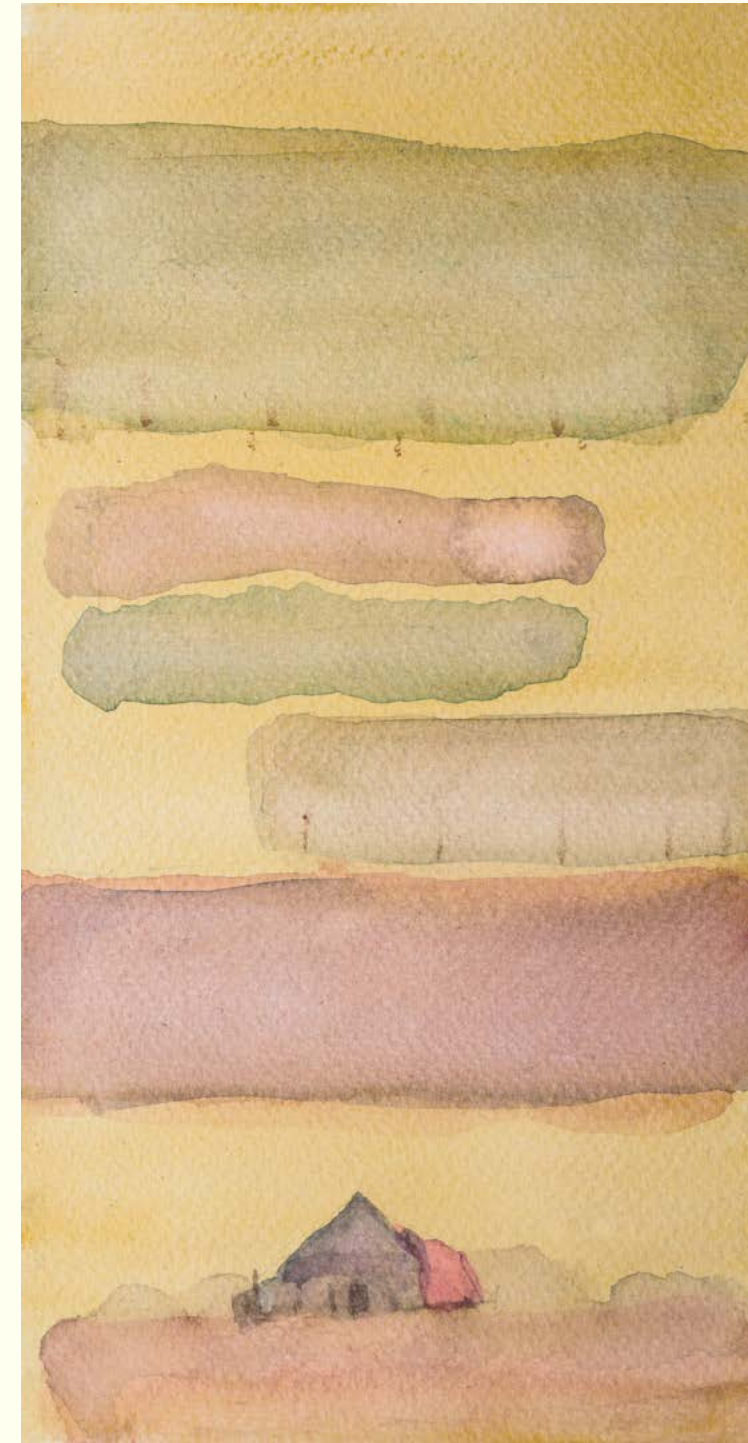
Illness in old age is always a transformation. In his later years Henri Matisse used pre-painted gouache cut-outs to make formidable forms that we seem to remember him with today . Physical disability allows an artistic mind to find forms that are relentless in their expression. Subhash has spent time near a lake in Bhor on the Western Ghats of Maharashtra. This plateau-esque terrain with valleys and a reservoir is stationary in time. Watercolours from here capture Awchat's view of the Sky as blue. He sees homes dwarfed under the horizon of the Sun. His monk-like figures run under colourful buntings that have affinities of form with geometrical abstraction. We realise how he uses space in his canvases; a particular work divided the paper into a palette of pastels . He is not using ochre . Brown is not to be seen . Bright Yellows , Pinks and Light Blues fill spaces where he doesn't find forms. A social person finally finds in the landscape a form to draw solitude.

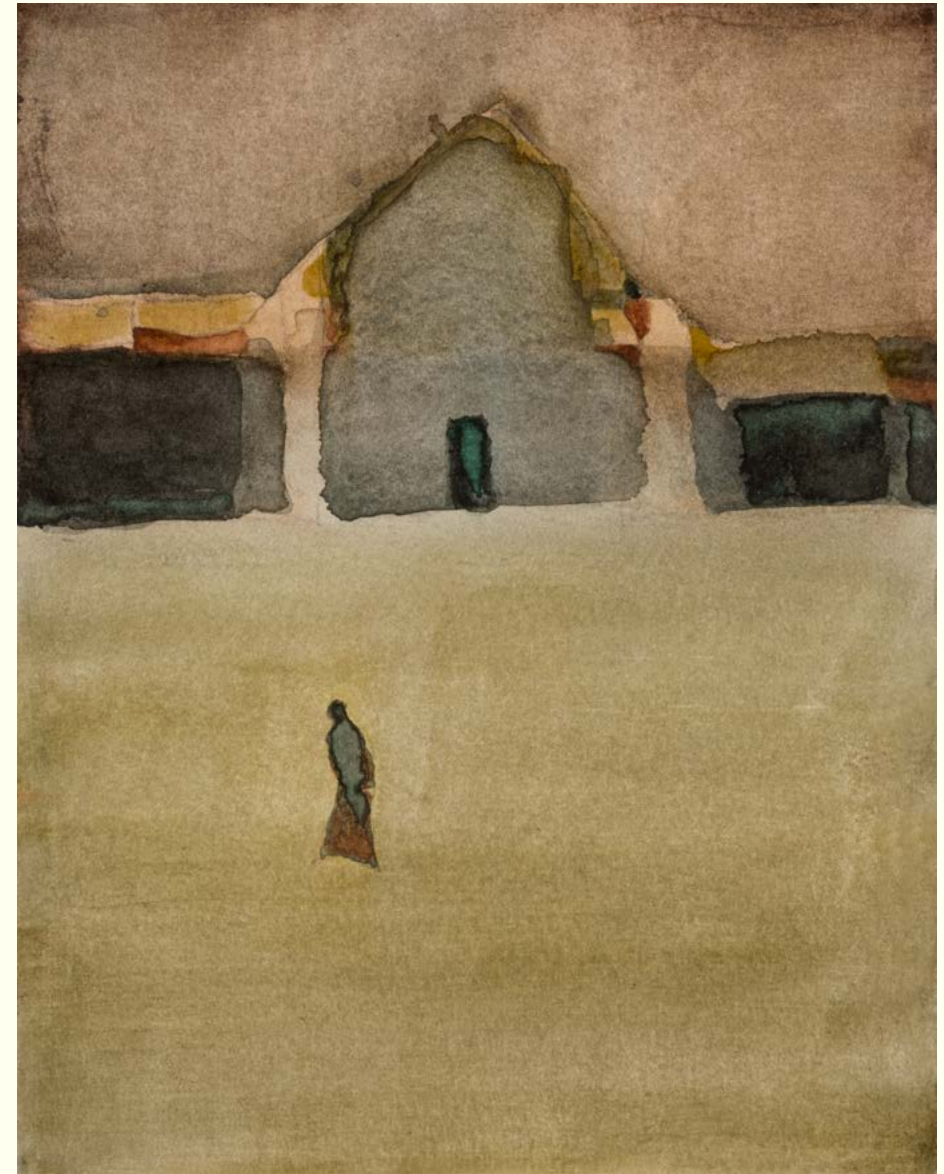
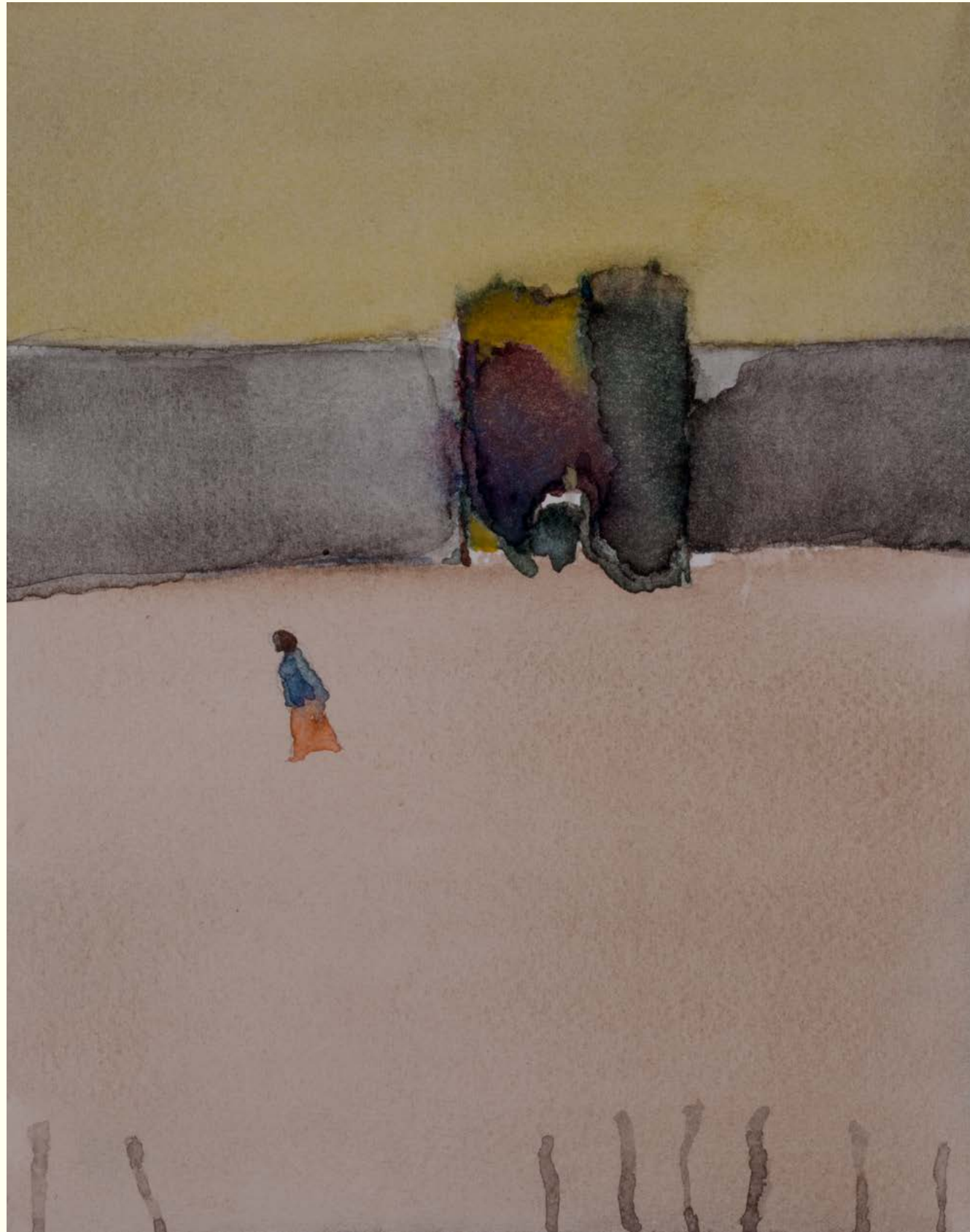
I have always wondered what and how artists will depict the pandemic. We are far beyond the ugly forms of the bacteria that artists drew up during the pandemic . For me it was a time of deep contemplation , seeking my faults and imagining myself who I would be if I survived in times when I lost loved ones , those were bleak reminders of our mortality. Subhash Awchat sought solitude , he wrote about his mind in newspapers at a time when he had no memory of his childhood. He is presently reconstructing it through photos sent by friends and stories told to him by his sister. But his present series of watercolours is a reflection of time, its structure not measured by a watch but one that is witnessed when we fall humble in a magnificent landscape. In French we would say ' aquarelles au fils du temps' or watercolours over the passage of time.

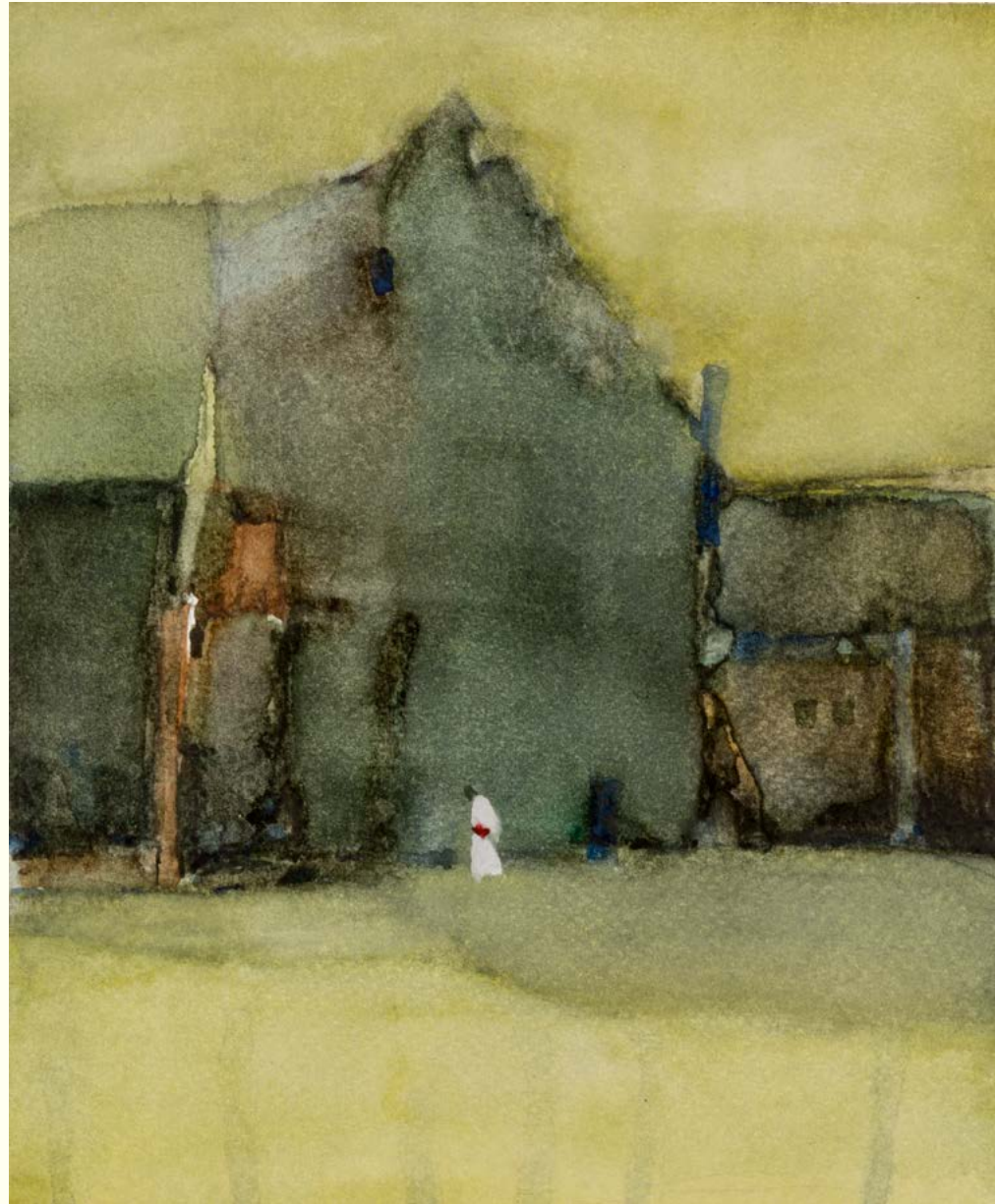
Art & Soul Editorial

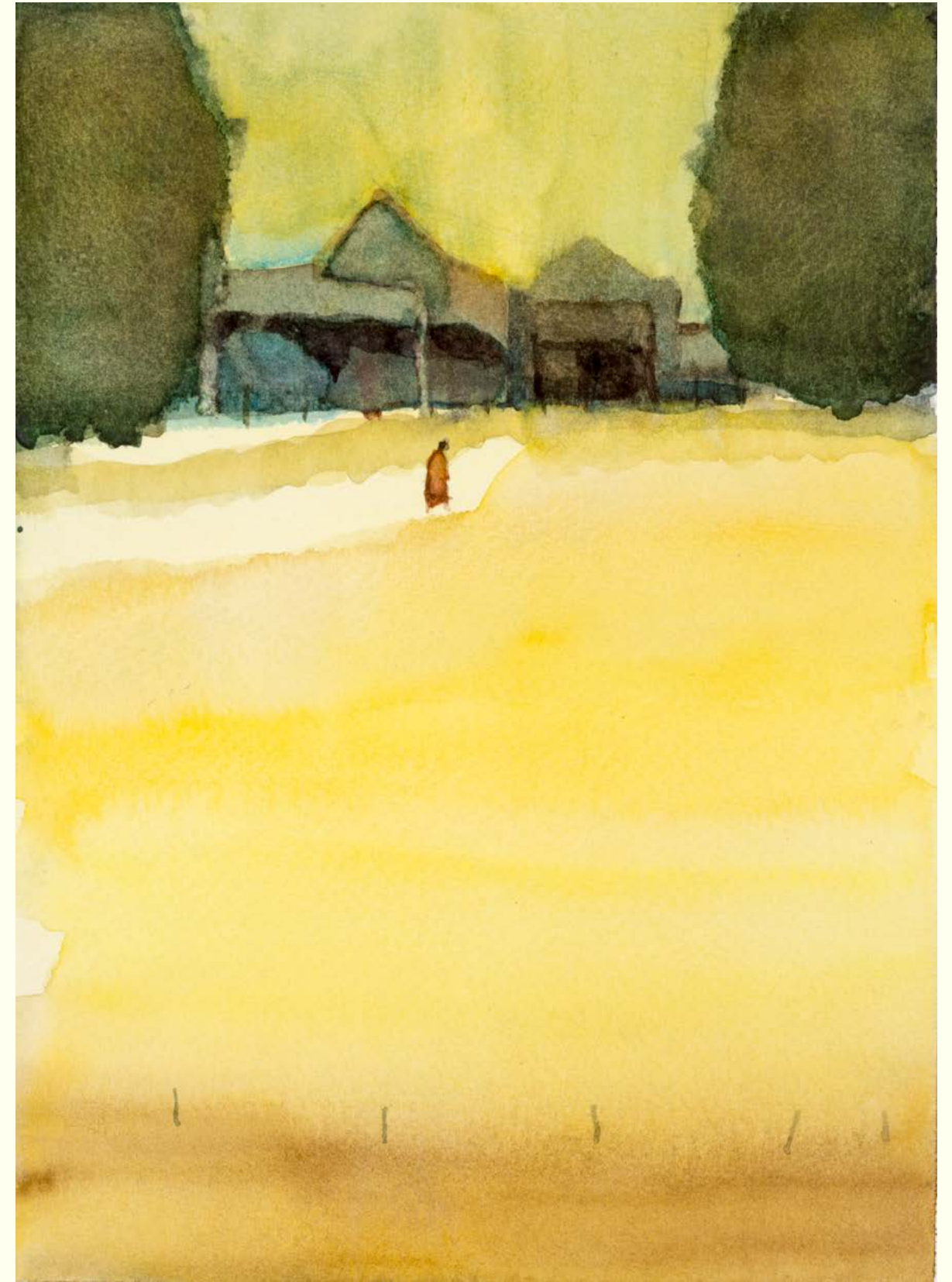


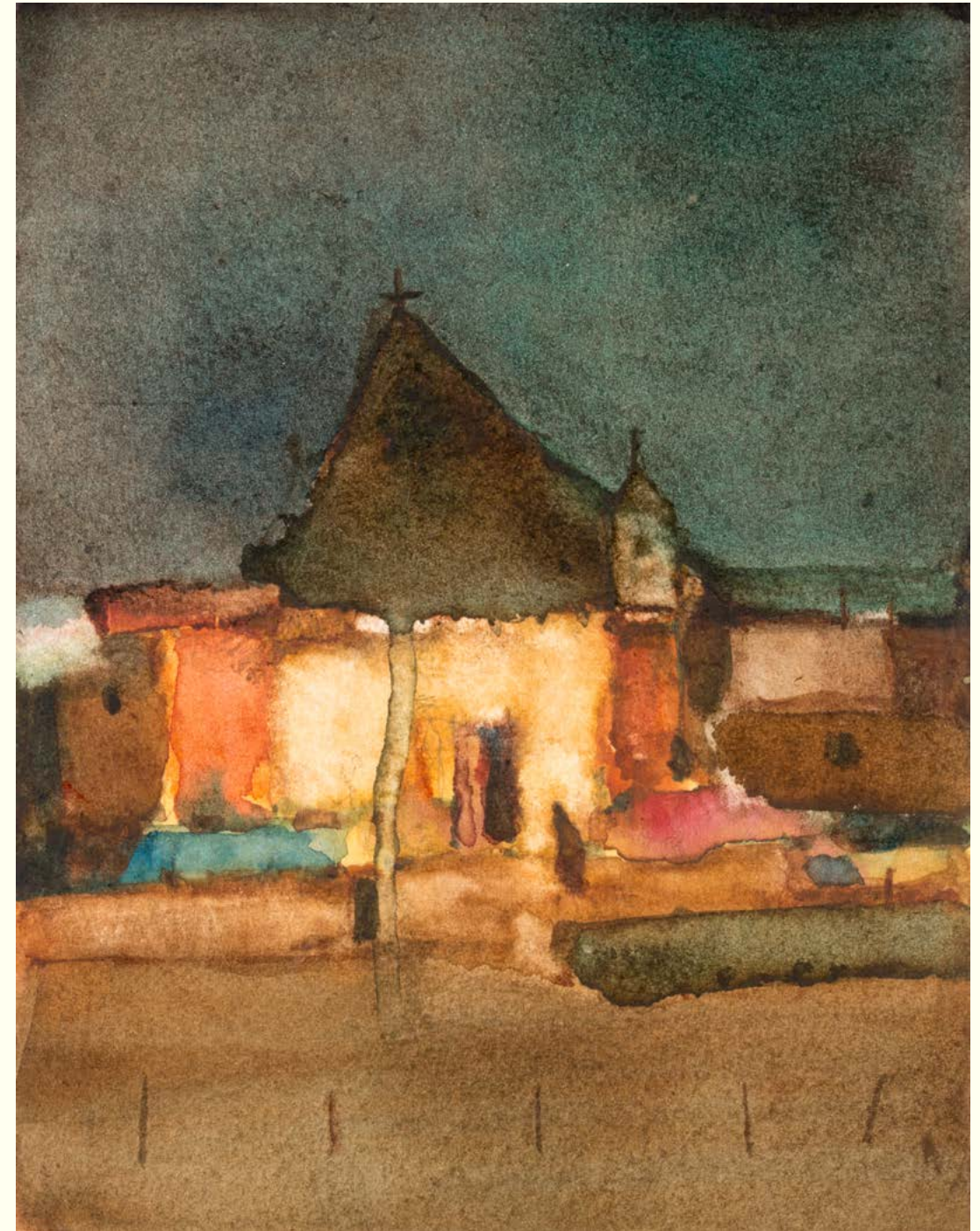
UNTITLED 8.5" X 7.5" | AQUARELLE ON PAPER









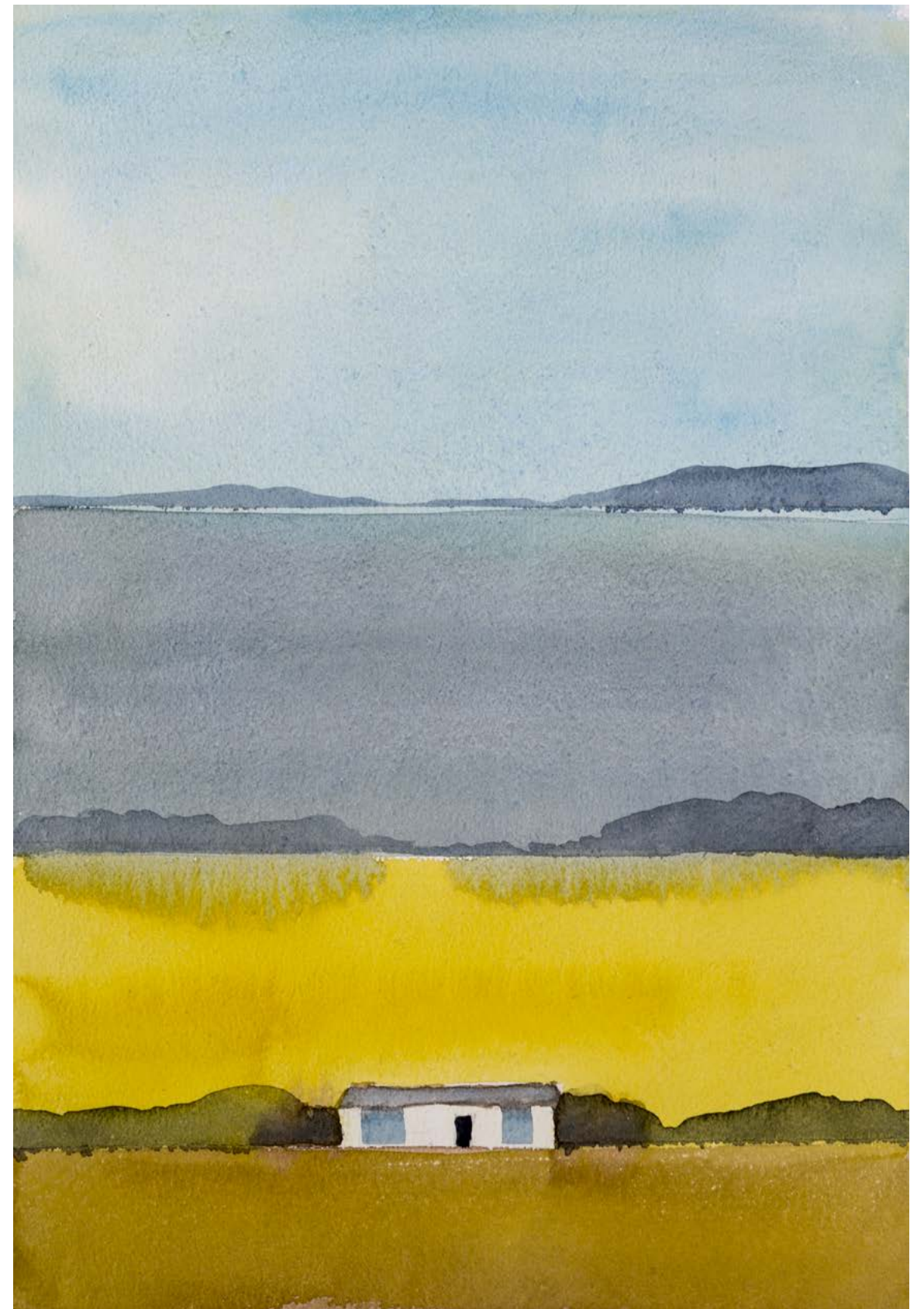








UNTITLED 10.5" X 9.5" | AQUARELLE ON PAPER

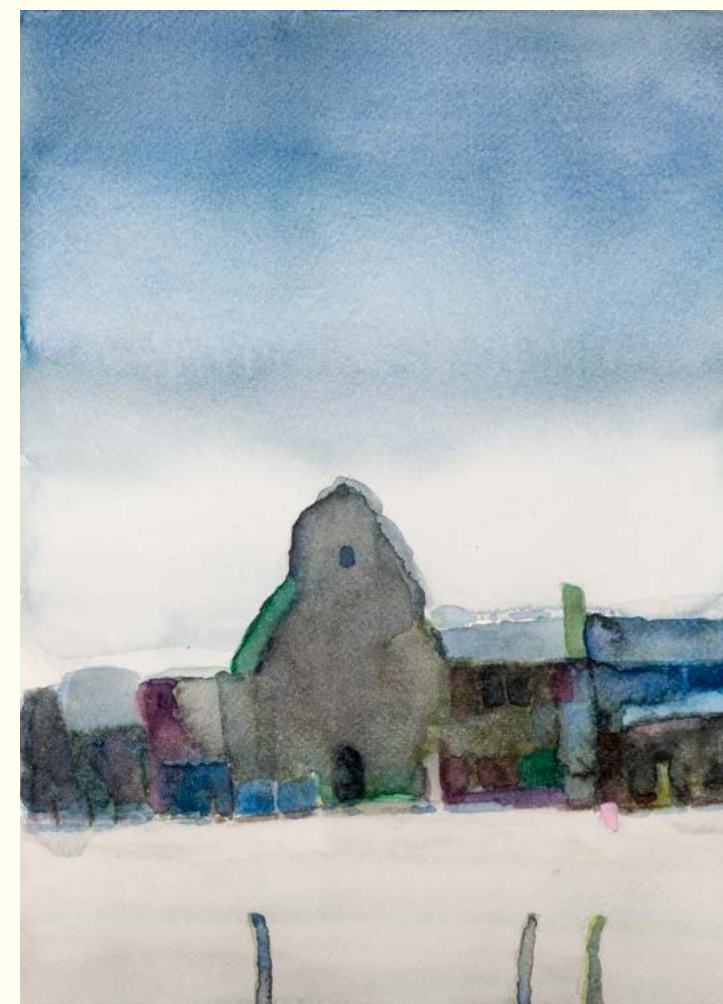


UNTITLED 13" X 9.5" | AQUARELLE ON PAPER



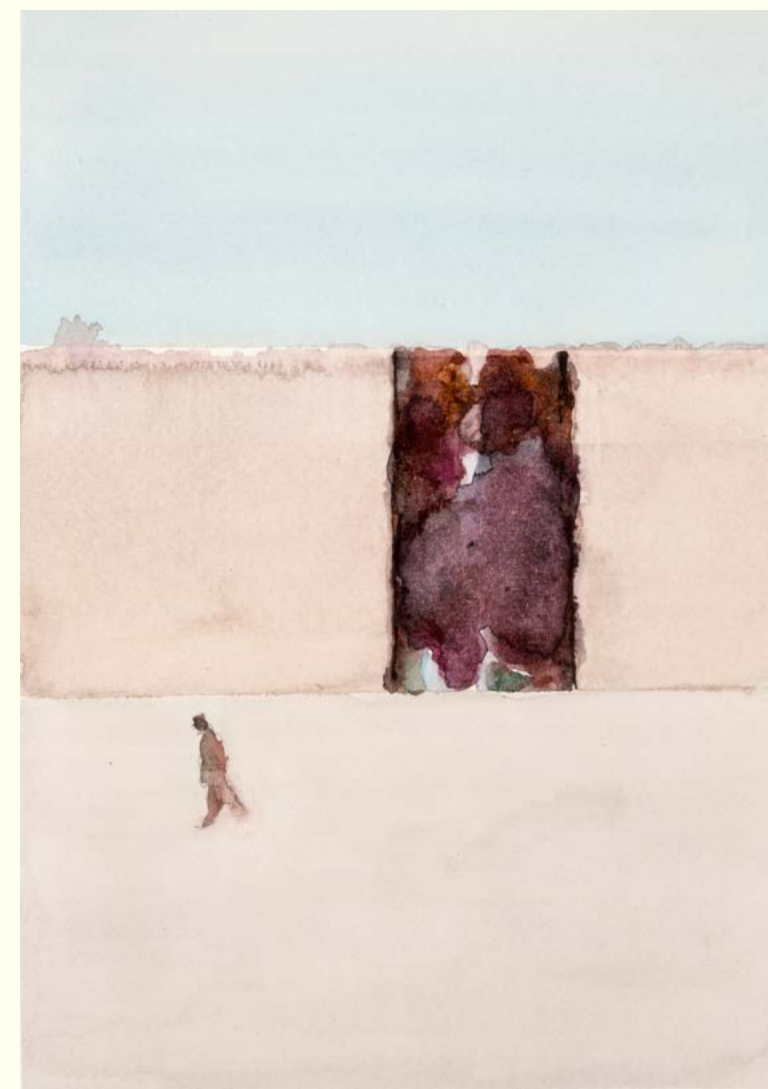




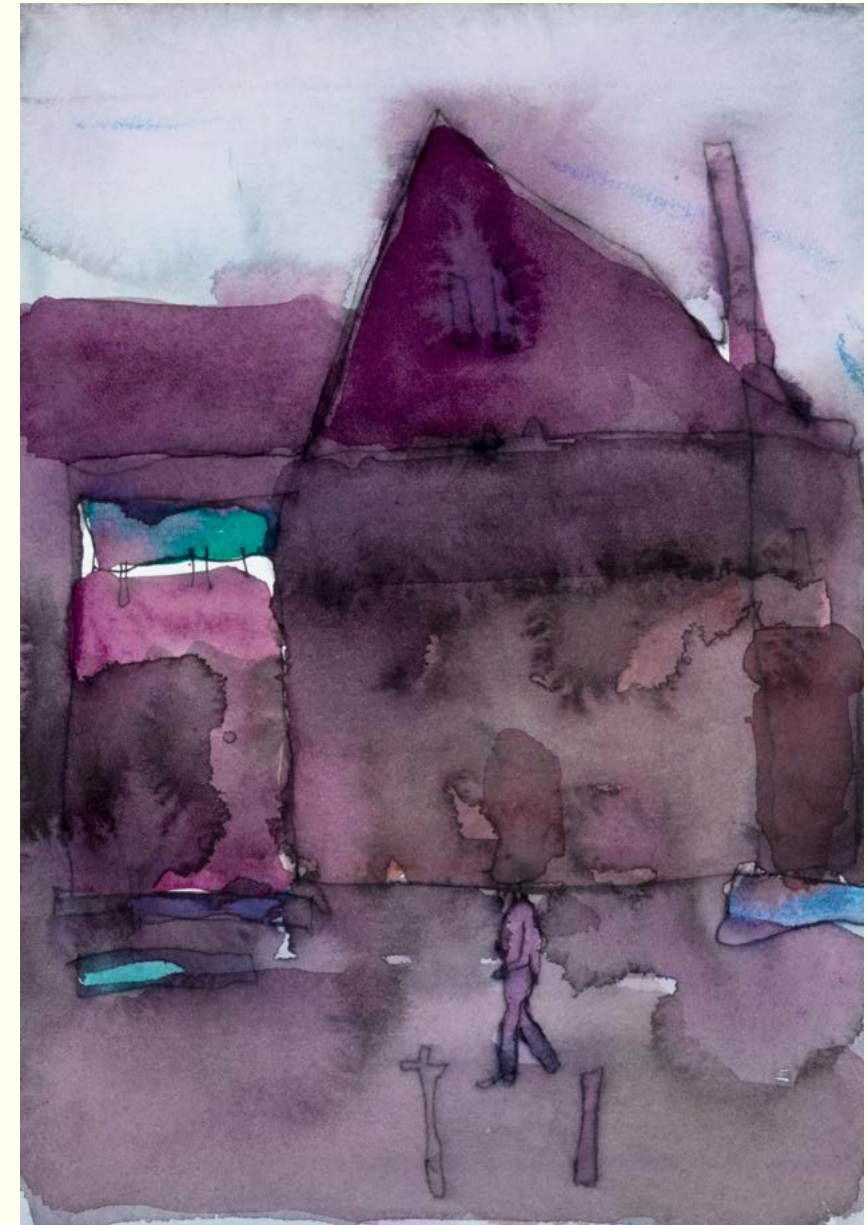


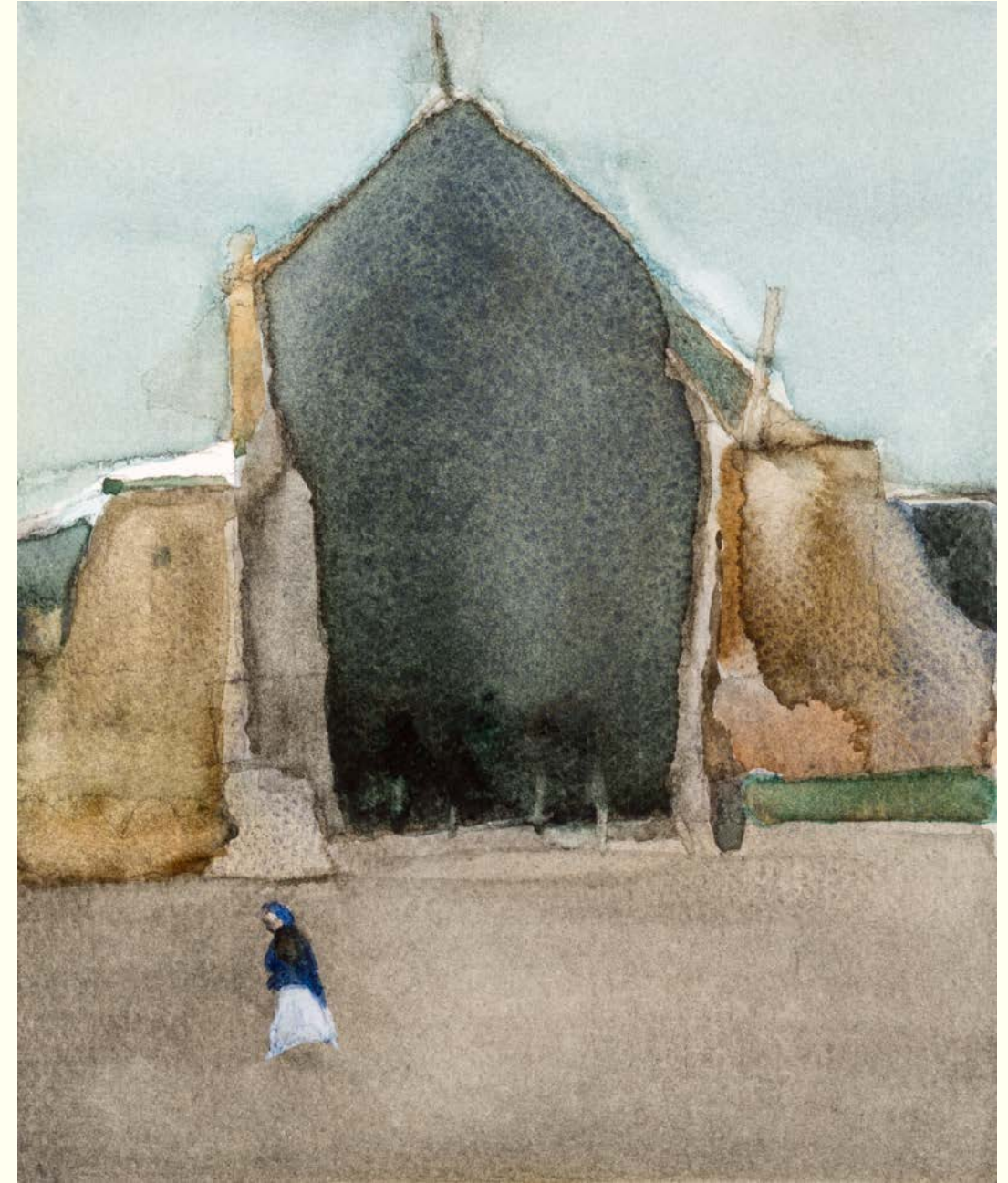








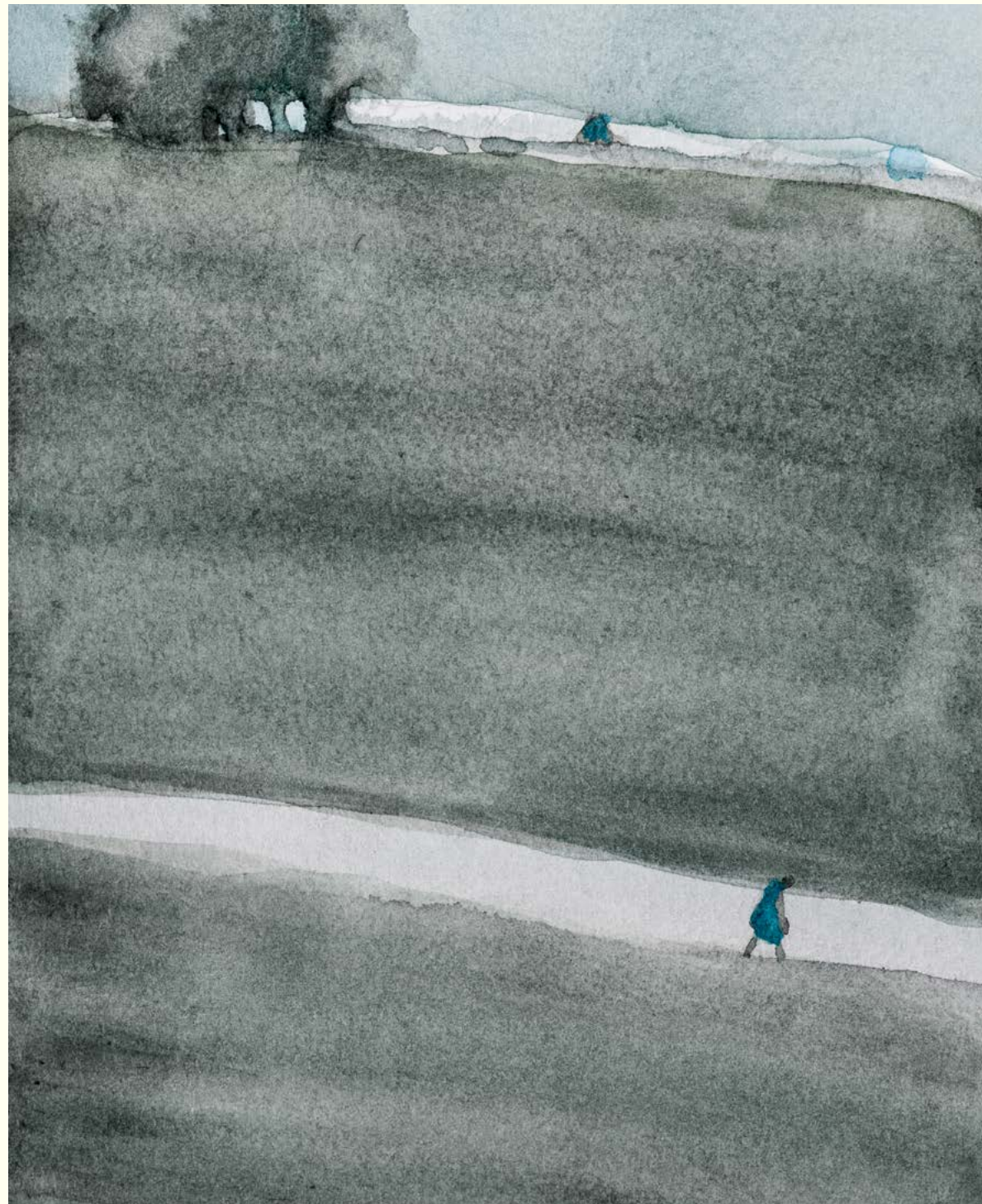
















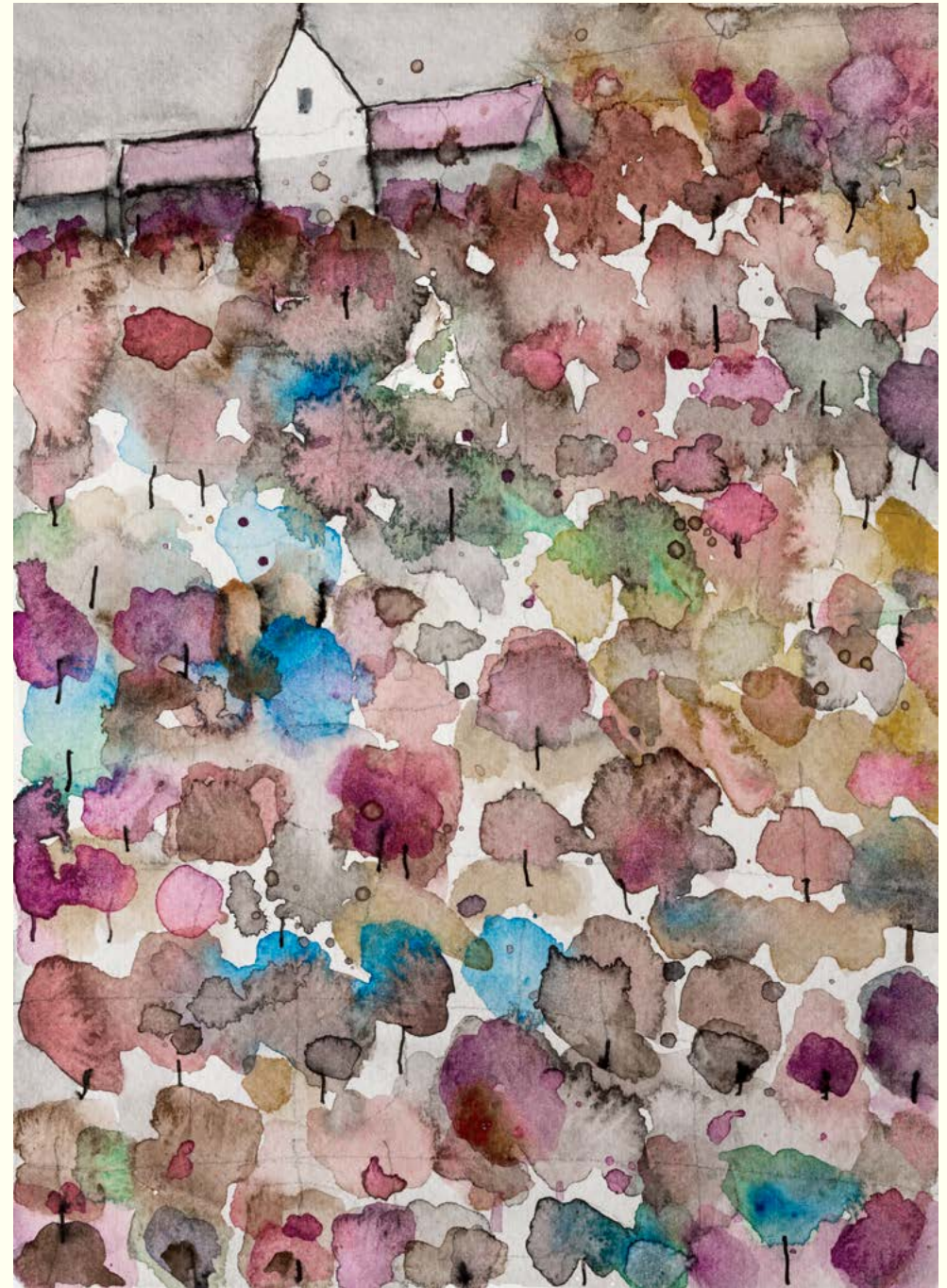
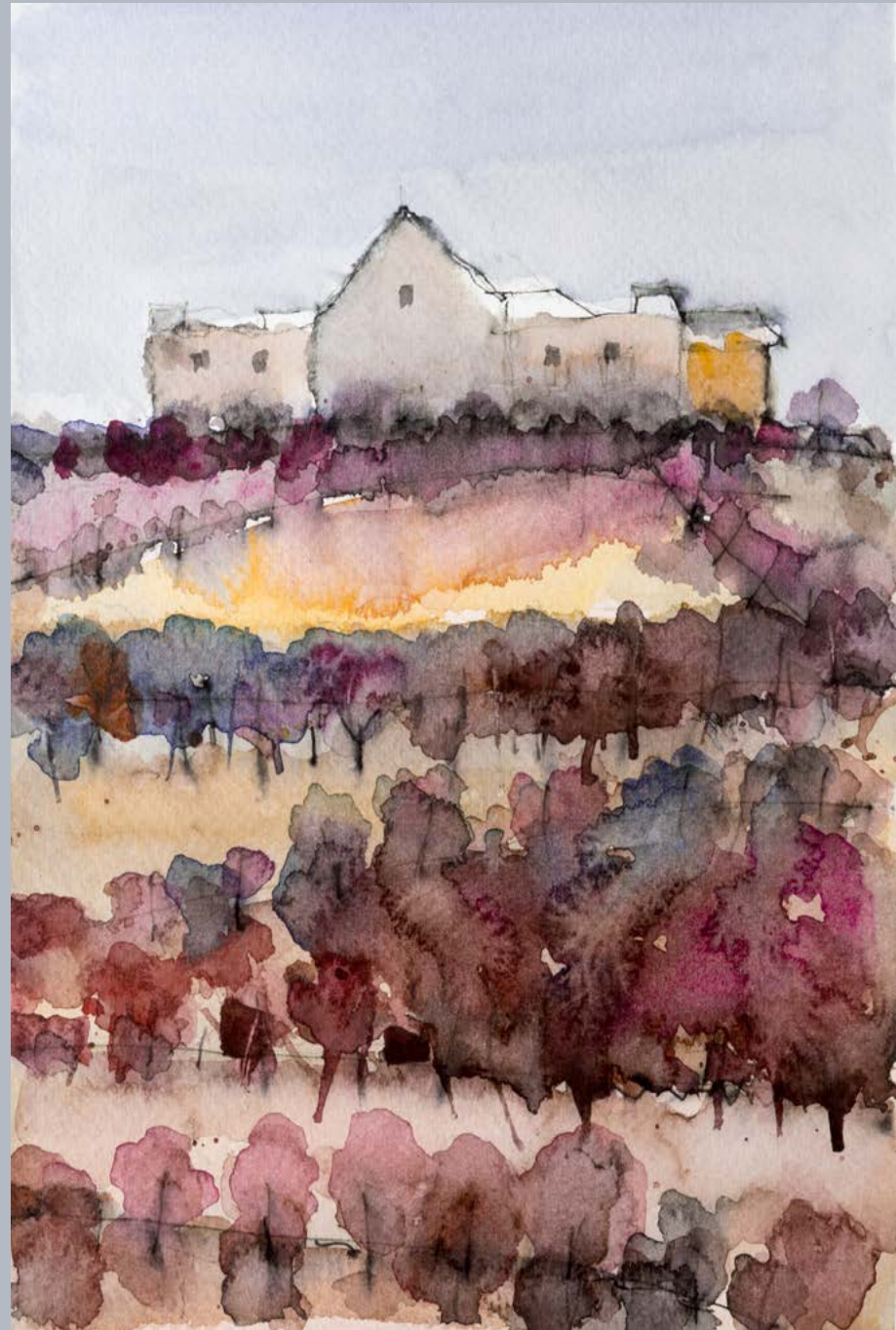




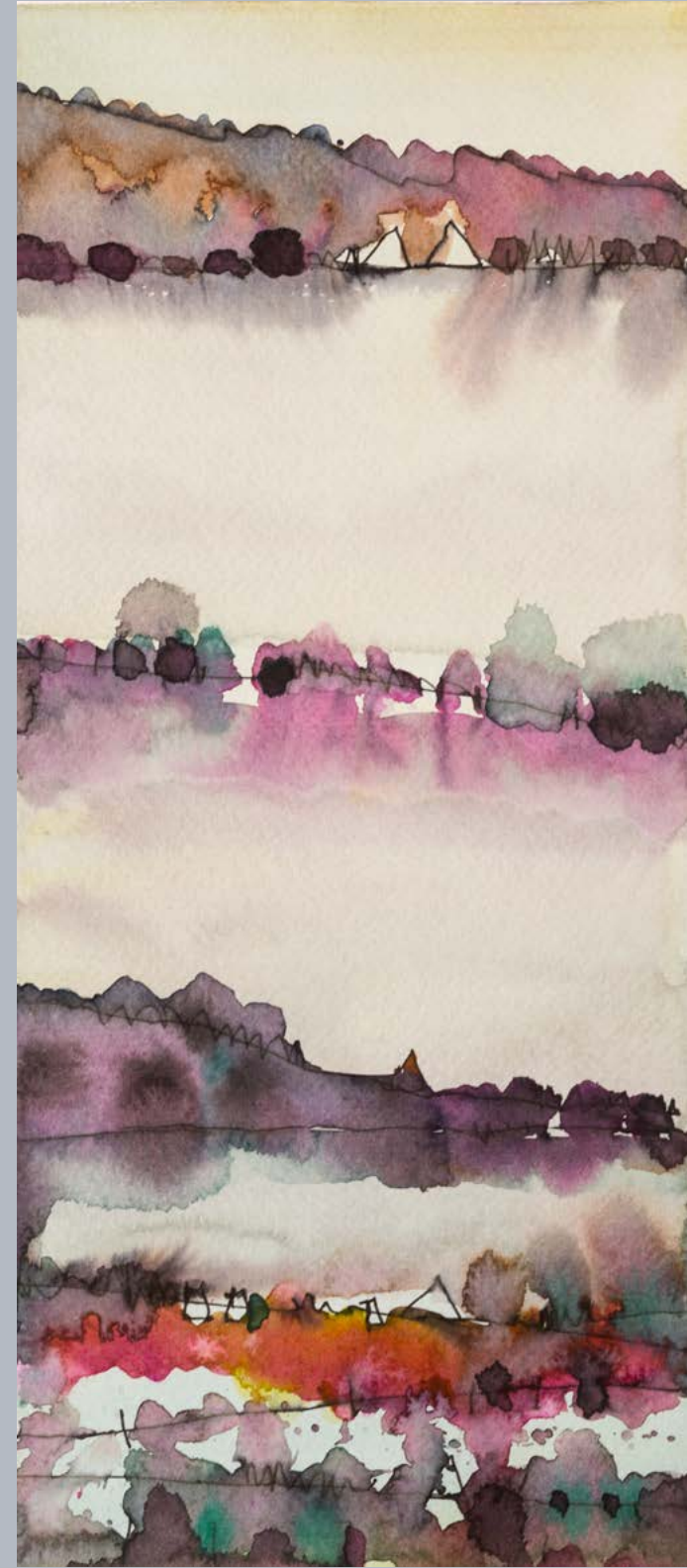






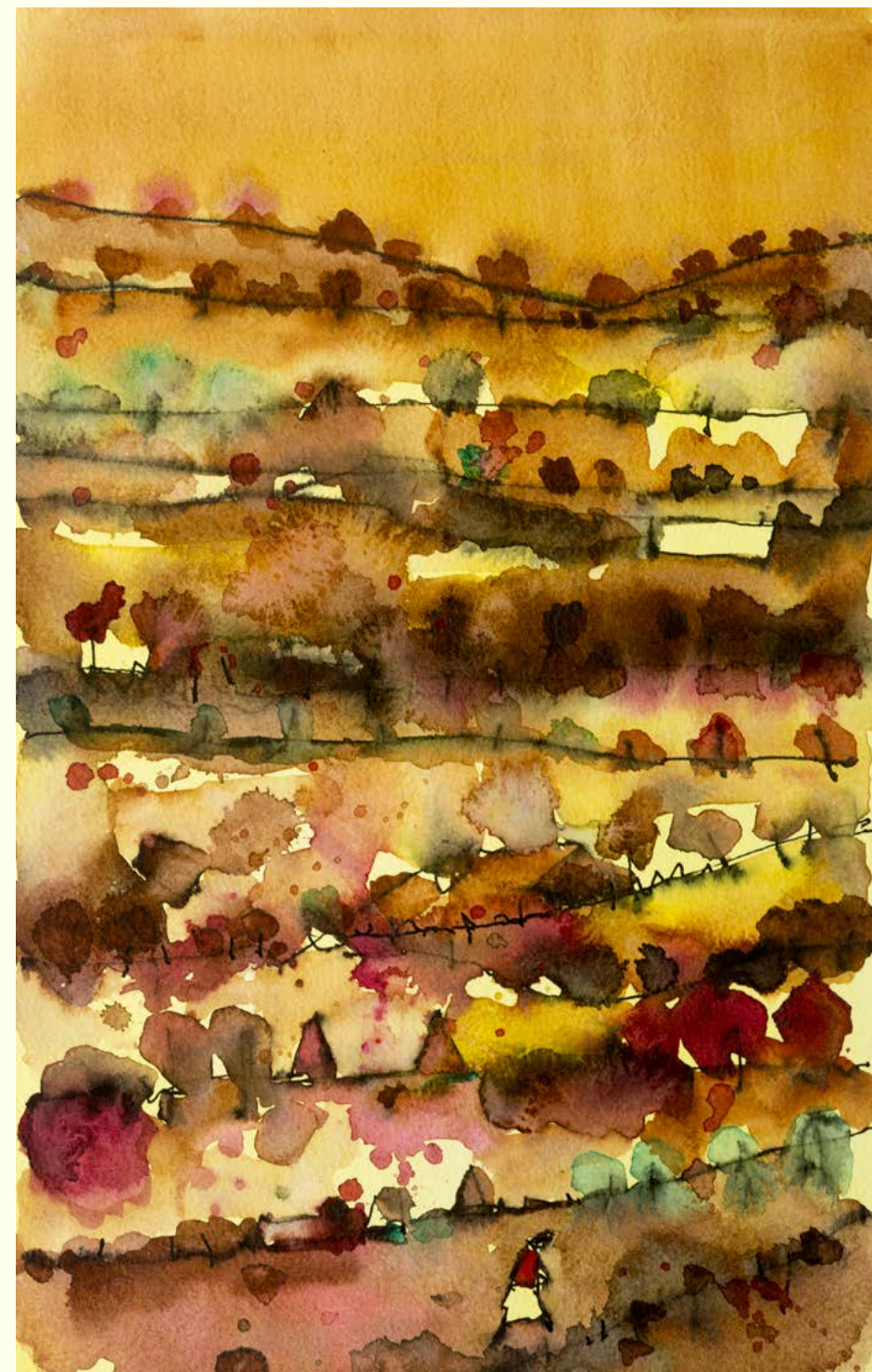








UNTITLED 12" X 8" | AQUARELLE ON PAPER



Over a passage of time
Au fils du temps
Aquarelles
by Subhash Awchat

11 Madhuli.
Shivsagar Estate,
Worli, Mumbai
400018
galleryartnsoul.com