



GAP.

• An Organised Voyage:
oil paintings, etchings and drawings

VALENTINE
WILLIE
fine ART

GAP. An Introduction to An Organised Voyage

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In a time and place where paintings live in museums and we live on the outside, GAP.'s art strives to resolve the often severed relationship between art and reality. Born in Paris in 1941, GAP. has been painting since 1957, studying in Paris and continuing her artistic career living and working in places as far apart as Zaire and Washington, Quebec and Amsterdam, and now in Malaysia. Her art is rooted in deep personal philosophies which she applies and embeds in her works. "The essence of my work....is a consciousness in matter"¹ - her art strives to make us intensely conscious of what we see, and how this reflects on what we are. A hat, a bag, a piece of clothing, a wall, a spectator in a museum - these are objects and people, on one level symbolic or representational, which come to life in GAP.'s art. They are scrutinised, simplified, intensified to the point of making us ask questions about the meaning of their form and existence, reaching the spectator on many different levels. GAP. works in series, each of which explores different areas and questions of perception, but each carrying personal references and cross-references which help to structure her world. The "voyage" is one made by the artist as she maps out, or "organises", this world, and it is also one made as we see into and go through her works into the matter they represent. "We live in a period of transformation in which consciousness is becoming more and more tangible, ever more present"² - as the world expands, so GAP.'s world develops and rises to offer artistic comment, with varying measures of irony and generosity.

The series *Mon artiste est un Yogi* (*My artist is a Yogi*) in 1993 grew out of GAP.'s reaction to a colleague's painting called *My artist is a butcher*, which was itself inspired by the slogan of a French advertisement campaign to sell more meat - "My butcher is an artist". Fond of puns visual and verbal for their ingenuous insights, GAP. has made here a retort in this volley of word-playing. The artist/butcher equation plays on current ideas of deconstruction in the arts, and importantly for GAP. the term "My artist" brings up the meaning of the artist for the individual. For GAP., the artist's role should not be like that of the butcher but rather like that of a Yogi, working towards a higher plane of consciousness and harmony in existence. The artist concentrates matter to bring us to a higher plane of consciousness of it. This is achieved through the symbolism and representation of her subjects; through the formal character of her compositions; through her focus on her media whether she be making paintings, etchings, or drawings. The central work of this series, the etching *Mon artiste est un Yogi, de face et de dos* (in full colour, brown monochrome and embossed prints) is exemplary. The artist as a Yogi is a nude figure seated for medi-

tation, her designation denoted by the paintbrushes for her fingers, shown from the front and back - a near literal interpretation of the title. The symmetrical compositional structure with its mystical overtones consolidates the analogy between art and spirituality. Further, her choice of etching enables the clarity and immediacy which comes through the paring down of matter, so we can readily engage with and 'see through' the work.

Also integral to this piece is the claustra on which the figure is seated. 'Claustra' is the Latin term for a small architectural element, about 30 by 30 cm and 6 to 15 cm thick, used for constructing fretted walls. For GAP. it seems to be found universally and often appears in her work serving many purposes. It can appear out of place or in mid-air, distracting us, throwing perspective, or as a main character. It is symbolic as a filter through which we see, and as a structuring element. GAP. suggests an analogy between the claustra and "the world ordinance" - geometric, structural yet "permanently opening up and expanding". Here it becomes a frame within a frame, directing our vision through it just as we 'see through' the work. In its many guises, the claustra plays the shaman's mask, a symbolic "transmitter", helping the artist to bring us through to the other side of the art and reality barrier.

The *Yogi* series ends with a large and magnificent oil painting *Mam est un Yogi* and related drawings. GAP. now moves away from the 'artist' in the *butcher/artist/Yogi* equation to applying the analogy of the Yogi to artistic subject matter. The subject of this painting is the artist's mother, shown larger than life, radiating calm and composure. It strikes one as a grand tribute to the subject, and a celebration of the achievements of portraiture itself. Portraiture's strength in European art history has lain in its efforts to capture, or concentrate, human physiology and character, social and spiritual, in one moment on the canvas. We engage with the portrait, find it more 'real' perhaps than works in other genres. There is reference to the grand tradition of portraiture in the formal pose (concentrating our gaze in a deliberate way), the importance of costume (particularly the sumptuous skirt reminiscent of Velazquez) and the positioning of symbolic attributes about the person. Notably, the claustra appears like a secret reference beneath her shoe, like a plan 'underfoot', making the subject and the spectator complicit, part of GAP.'s world.

"[Art museums] are so much part of our lives today that we forget they have imposed on the spectator a whole new

attitude towards the work of art. For they have tended to estrange the works they bring together from their original functions and to transform even portraits into 'pictures'."³

GAP.'s work on the official art of museums spans a good part of her recent career. Here, she explores what it is to look at art in museums and galleries, and at the process of encasing and establishing a canon of art for the public. If *Mon artiste est un Yogi* argues for the role of the artist to bring 'matter' into greater consciousness, in this series she makes us examine the barriers put up between art and the real through making us engage with the very 'matter' of these barriers. Museums open up but also close off personal reactions to art by its prescriptiveness and, more literally, with its walls. In several works in this series, GAP. shows the spectator looking at paintings in the museum, thereby creating an interesting perspective layer, at once exposing and re-instating the personal relationship between spectator and the art before our eyes. *Claustra devant le Jeu de Paume* places the spectator in front of the solid wall of the art museum - he or she is closed off from the 'art' within; the claustra, our visual filter, is also outside. We see only the wall and are forced to address the wall, what it means, what it makes us feel, what it reflects about the museum and museum culture. Similarly, by focusing on museum bags "without the museum", she casts some witty comments on the significance of the commercialisation they represent, and at the same time sabotages the distancing effect of commercialisation and politicisation by 'turning' the bags 'back into art'.

In *Red tudung on the new National Art Gallery Jln Tun Razak #2*, GAP. brings her explorations in art museums to bear on local experience. Here she exposes the art museum in genesis. For Malaysia, there is hope for such an edifice as a major cultural emblem. What GAP. sees is something more basic - there are no walls, no pictures, no spectators as yet, implying only an unseen agenda. She pieces together four elements in a simple composition - the green land, the blue sky, the naked pilings and a red tudung billowing ambiguously over the pilings in the shape of the new roof.....

In GAP.'s latest 'Malaysian' series, the pre-occupation with structure and visibility in the claustra is largely eclipsed by a fascination with the Islamic headdress - the tudung. As with the claustra, GAP. seizes on the symbolic and formal potential of this object. Here, the enigmatic tudung, with its cultural background and mystifying, protective function becomes a forum for (or even the "matter" of) her ideas and her reaction to her Malaysian environment. In *Selendang tudung kuning di bawah claustra* and *Claustra di atas selendang tudung kuning*,

on one level what we see is a fretted architectural object beneath and then above a piece of cloth. Yet there seems to be a fight for supremacy between these two elements - between visibility and structure, and opacity and mystification. These make a simple visual analogy where two material elements familiar to GAP. engage with each other literally and symbolically, and it is clear that the artist is beginning to explore a new area of material consciousness.

In *2 green tudung* and *Pink tudung* GAP. takes another approach to the tudung. Here it takes over as a structural compositional device - seen from the back against clear blue sky, the tudung appear as almost abstract forms, or organic natural forms filling the canvas - not mute but secretive, 'embodying' something. These paintings seem to ask us simply to begin to engage with the tudung, ubiquitous in Malaysia, as matter and form. *Faces with tudung* are another interesting formal excursion with the tudung. The enshrouding tudung also highlights facial expression - here it is used as a new type of frame for the portrait. Everything is in the expression of the faces, upon which our eyes are forcefully riveted. They are quite different in their style of portraiture from *Mam est un Yogi*, where the subject is made clear and real partly by her bearing and her surroundings. GAP. uses the tudung to bring us closer to and more conscious of the face itself and its special qualities. Not hostile to but perhaps bemused by the tudung and what it may represent, GAP. resourcefully grapples with its form and symbolism in refreshing ways in these most recent paintings in which she reacts to her current environment. However, the familiar and the universal do remain at hand, and her faithful claustra appears in Malaysian guise in *Chinese pillow* and *Malacca Chinese claustra*.

GAP. is an artist with a sharp eye for the overlooked, and is always ready to invest in the formal and symbolic potential of matter, just as we often invest meaning in objects. On GAP.'s organised voyage, we see familiar things in unlikely places, we begin to weigh up the significance of universal or local forms, we become aware of both the dynamism and the solidity of matter, of play and paradox in what we see, and we are reminded to remain conscious always of what constitutes existence.

Beverly Yong

¹ Alice Pezzard Interview GAP., Editions Atelier GAP., Paris 1997, p. 78

² *Ibid.*, p. 78

³ André Malraux, *The Voices of Silence*, trans. Stuart Gilbert 1953, Bollingen Series XXIV.A, New Jersey, p. 13-14

Born

- 1941 in Paris France, citizen : France - Netherlands
- 1957 began oil painting
- 1965 graduated from Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs in Paris

Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 1979 *Paintings* Central Daviel, Théâtre 13, Paris
- 1981 *Paintings, 1980 in Zaïre* French Cult Centre, Kinshasa, Zaïre
- 1982/83 *Au Zaïre* French Institute, Brême, Allemagne - Maison Descartes, Amsterdam
- 1983 *Paintings* Arti/Shock Gallery, Rijswijk, Netherlands
- 1985 *Paintings and Drawings* GAP.'s Studio, The Hague, Netherlands
- 1987 *Paintings* Alex Gallery, Washington DC, USA
- 1988 *Around the Museum* The Arts Club of Washington DC, USA
- 1990 *Paintings* Françoise Bolognini Gallery, 57100 Thionville, France
- 1990/91 *Paintings* Olivetti, 75008 Paris
- 1992 *Estampes* French Cult Centre Bamako, Mali - *Paintings* CCC Gallery, 55 rue Quincampoix Paris
- 1994 *Musée claustra - Claustra museum* Observatoire 4 Gallery, Montréal Québec, Canada

Au-delà du musée..., claustra. Beyond the museum..., claustra. Mais cult Côte-des-Neiges, Montréal QC
- 1995 *Poème 25 & Poème Claustra* Artist Books, Gallimand Library, Montréal QC
- 1996 *Bakoro* Artist Book & 7 Woodcuts, La Trancheville, Montréal QC
GAP. Artiste Books Maison Descartes, Amsterdam, Netherlands
- 1997 *Musée & claustra à travers le monde. 1982 - 1997* Maison Descartes, Amsterdam
- 1998 *Estampes* French Cult Centre Arthur Rimbaud, Djibouti

Public Collections

Fonds Nationaux d'Art Contemporain, Paris - Bibliothèque Nationale France - City of Paris - City of the Hague, Netherlands - Musée Solidarité Salvador Allende, Santiago de Chile - Federal City of Shelter, Washington DC - National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington DC - Library of Congress, Washington DC - Bibliothèque Nationale Québec, Montréal - Bibliothèque Nationale Canada, Ottawa

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 1963 3 Painters, Cadomus Gallery, France
- 1970/73 Salon Jeune Peinture : Halles, Musée art Moderne Ville Paris, Grand Palais Paris
- 1972 *Amnistia Spagna* Milan, Italie - 5 painters, CROUS, Paris
- 1973 2ème Biennale de l'Estampe, Villeparisis, France
- 1973/78 Exhibitions with Pousse Caillou Studio, France
- 1974 *Estampes* Librairie L'Harmattan, rue des Quatre Vents, 75006 Paris
- 1978 *Art Suivre* Espace Cardin, Paris - L'Estampe aujourd'hui 73-78 B.N. Paris
- 1979 International Museum Salvador Allende, Paris, Nancy...
- 1980 Echelle I Gallery, 75003 Paris
- 1982 Salon Comparaisons, Grand Palais, Paris
- 1983 *Reflets83* French Instituts Amsterdam, The Hague, Rotterdam
- 1987 *Focus on Realism* Art Barn Gal, Washington DC - Graphics Guild Philadelphia PA, USA
- 1988/89 *Crossroads*, Washington Square, Washington DC, USA
- 1991 *Tanzplantz der Musen* 10 years FrauenMuseum, Bonn, Germany
Het andere eten Krinnie Beyen, Amersfoort, Netherlands
- 1992 Salon Comparaisons Grand Palais Paris - *De Bonnard à Baselitz* B.N. Paris
- 1992/93 *Artist Book* Colbert Library of B.N. Paris
- 1993/94 *Book As Art VI* Nat Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington DC
- 1995 Salon Comparaisons Espace Eiffel Branly Paris - Spanier Gallery Matagiri, Mt Tremper NY USA

S.N.A.P. at Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Quai Malaquai, Paris
- 1995/96 Rolf Rückert Gallery, 55 rue Quincampoix, 75004 Paris
- 1996 *Livres à voir* Q la Batterie Arras, France - *Inheritance* Intercult Center Strathearn, Montréal
- 1998 Salon Comparaisons Espace Eiffel Branly, 75007 Paris

Atelier GAP. Editions

- 1971 Artist's Book: ?, silk-screen, book for children, #1 to 150
- 1973/79 Editions with Pousse Caillou Studio litho, Paris
- 1988 Catalogue *GAP. Around the Museum Paintings* ISBN 2-9503036-2-5
- 1989 Artist's Book: *Poème 25*, etching, ISBN 2-9503036-1-7
- 1991 Artist's Book: *Poème Claustra*, embossing
- 1993/95 Etchings Editions, Printer Luc Nadeau, Montréal QC, Canada
- 1994 Catalogue *Au-delà du musée..., claustra.* ISBN 2-9503036-2-5
- 1996 Artist's Book : *BAKORO*, Woodcut, ISBN 2-9503036-3-3
- 1997 *Alice Pezard Interview GAP.* ISBN 2-9503036-4-1

**Mon artiste est un Yogi,
de face et de dos**

1993

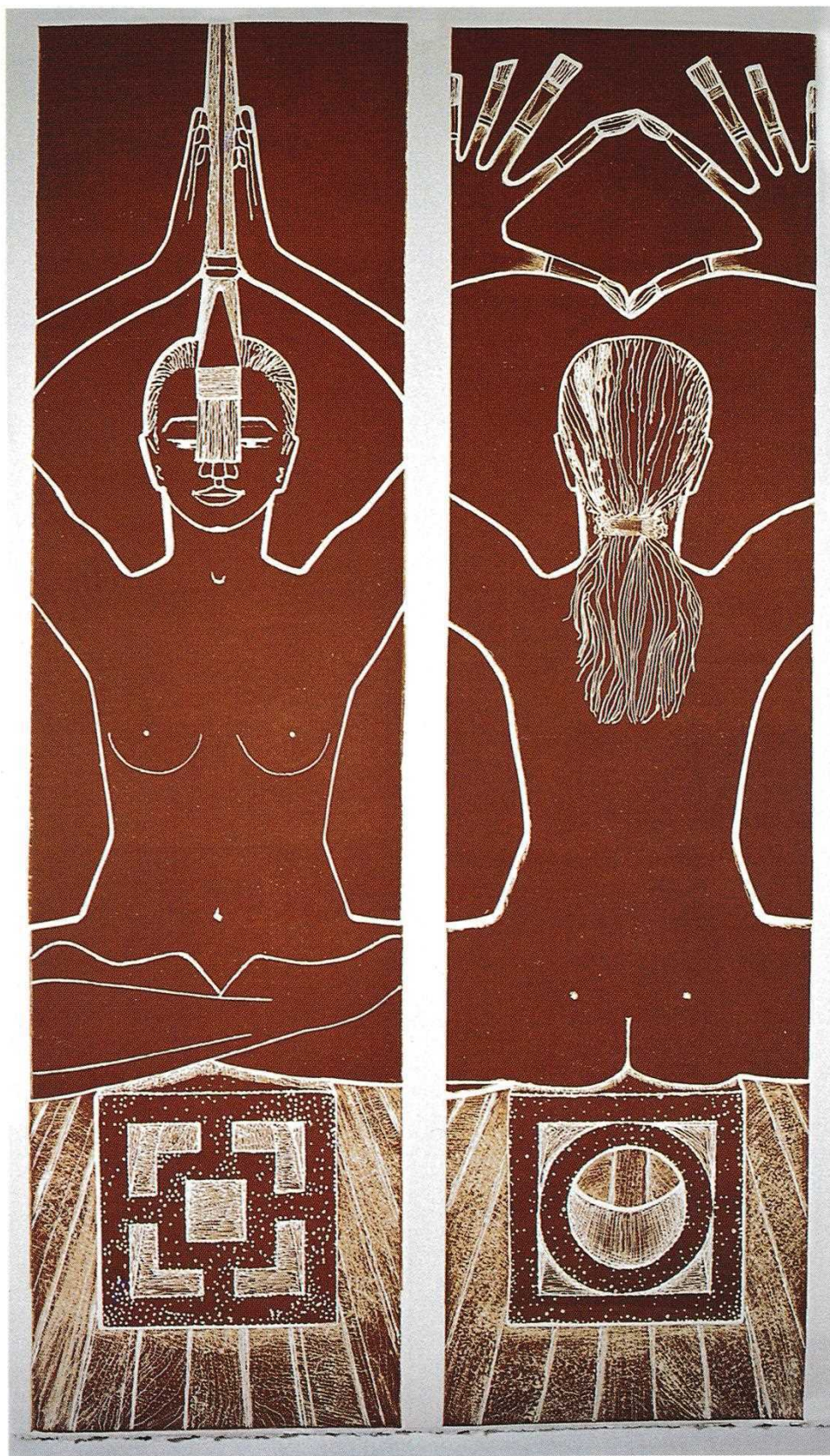
Etching, numbered edition 1-15

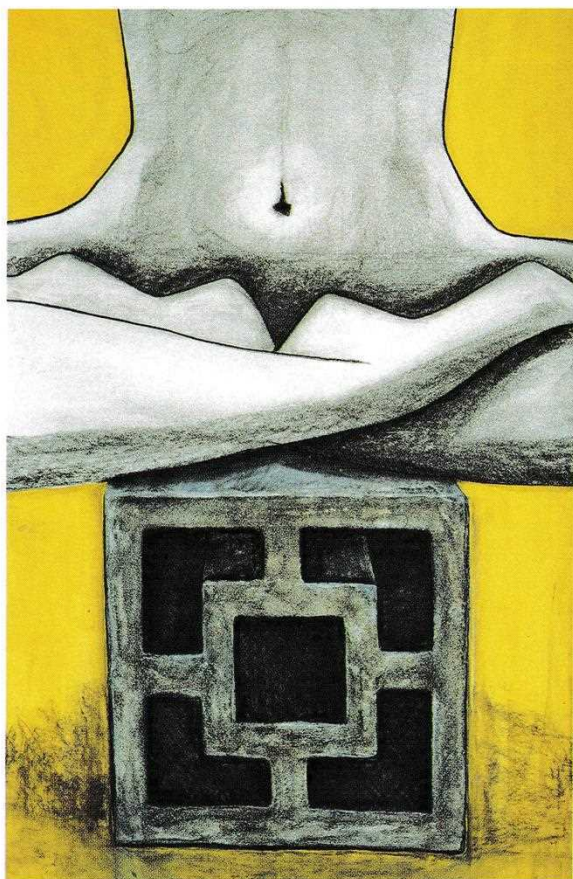
electric drypoint on plexiglas

negatif print brown ink

on BFK 300 g

120 x 80 cm





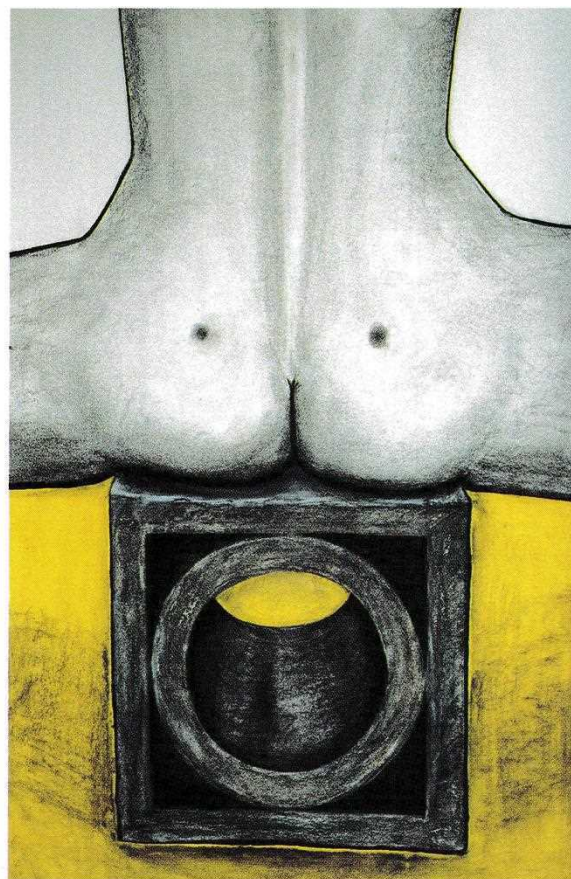
**Mon artiste est un Yogi,
de face, détail**

1993

Charcoal, sand, ink on Holland

white paper 300 g

100 x 65 cm



**Mon artiste est un Yogi,
de dos, détail**

1993

Charcoal, sand, ink on Holland

white paper 300 g

100 x 65 cm

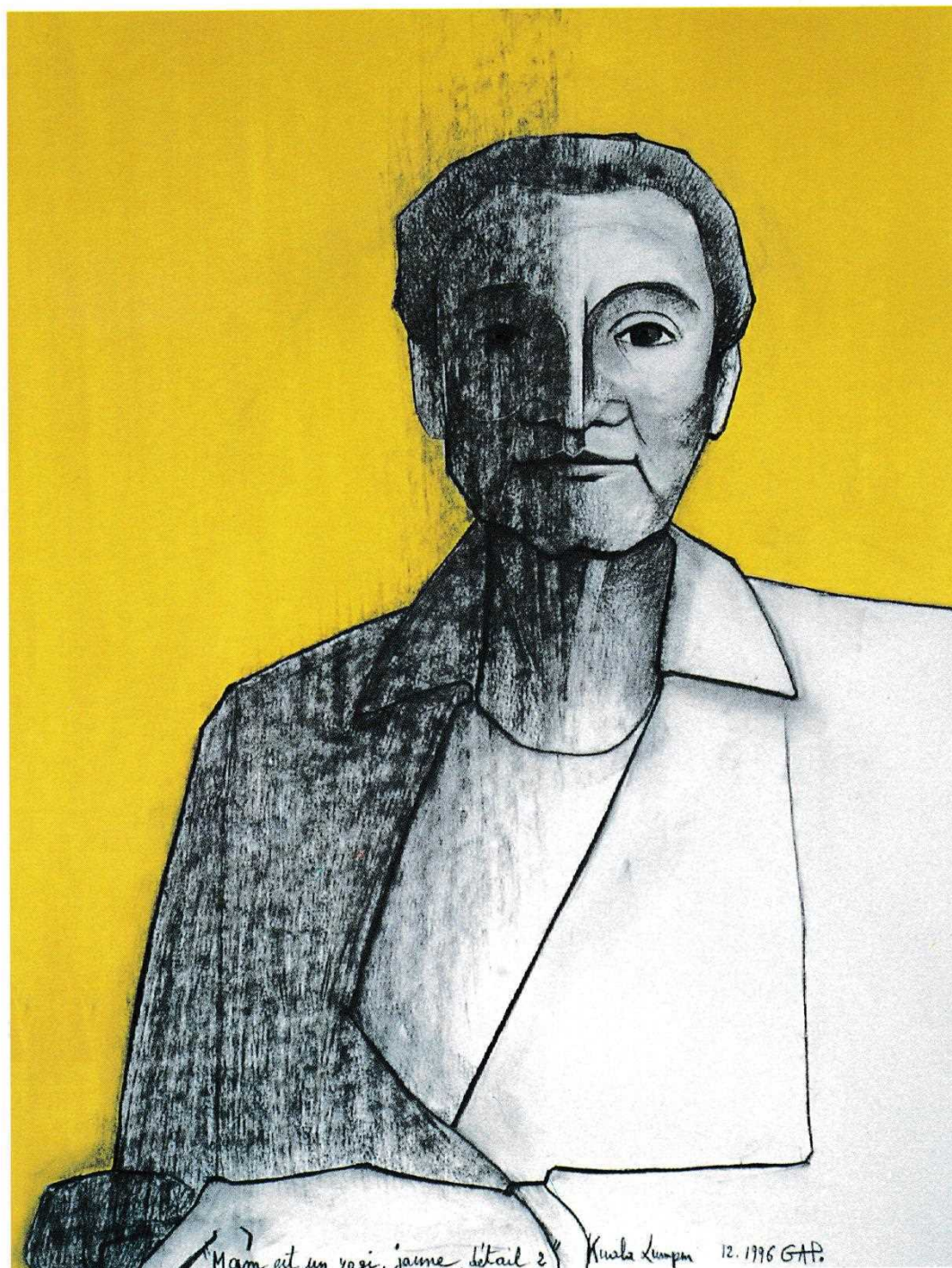
**Mam est un Yogi, jaune,
détail 2**

1996

Charcoal, yellow ink on

Arches white paper 300 g

76 x 57 cm





Mam est un Yogi

1996/7

Oil, sand on linen

190 x 122 cm

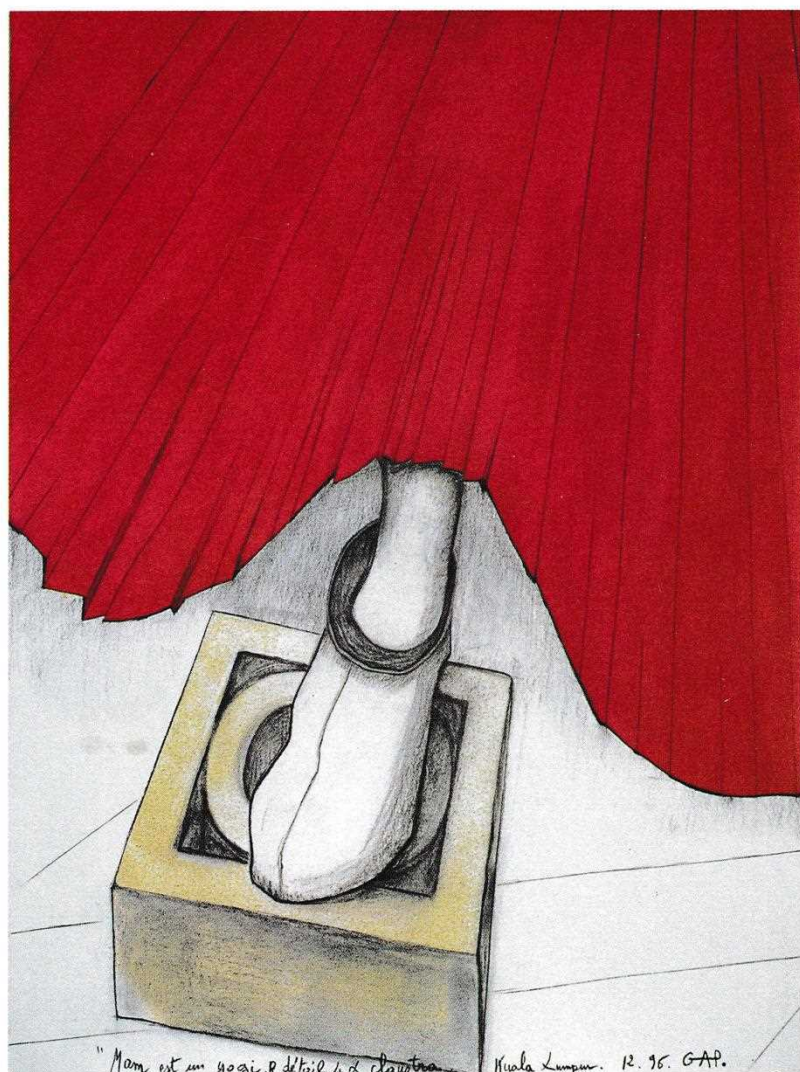
**Mam est un Yogi, R,
détail 4, & claustro**

1996

Charcoal, red ink on

Arches white paper 300 g

76 x 57 cm



"Mam est un Yogi, R détail 4 & claustro" Kuala Lumpur. 12. 96. G.A.P.

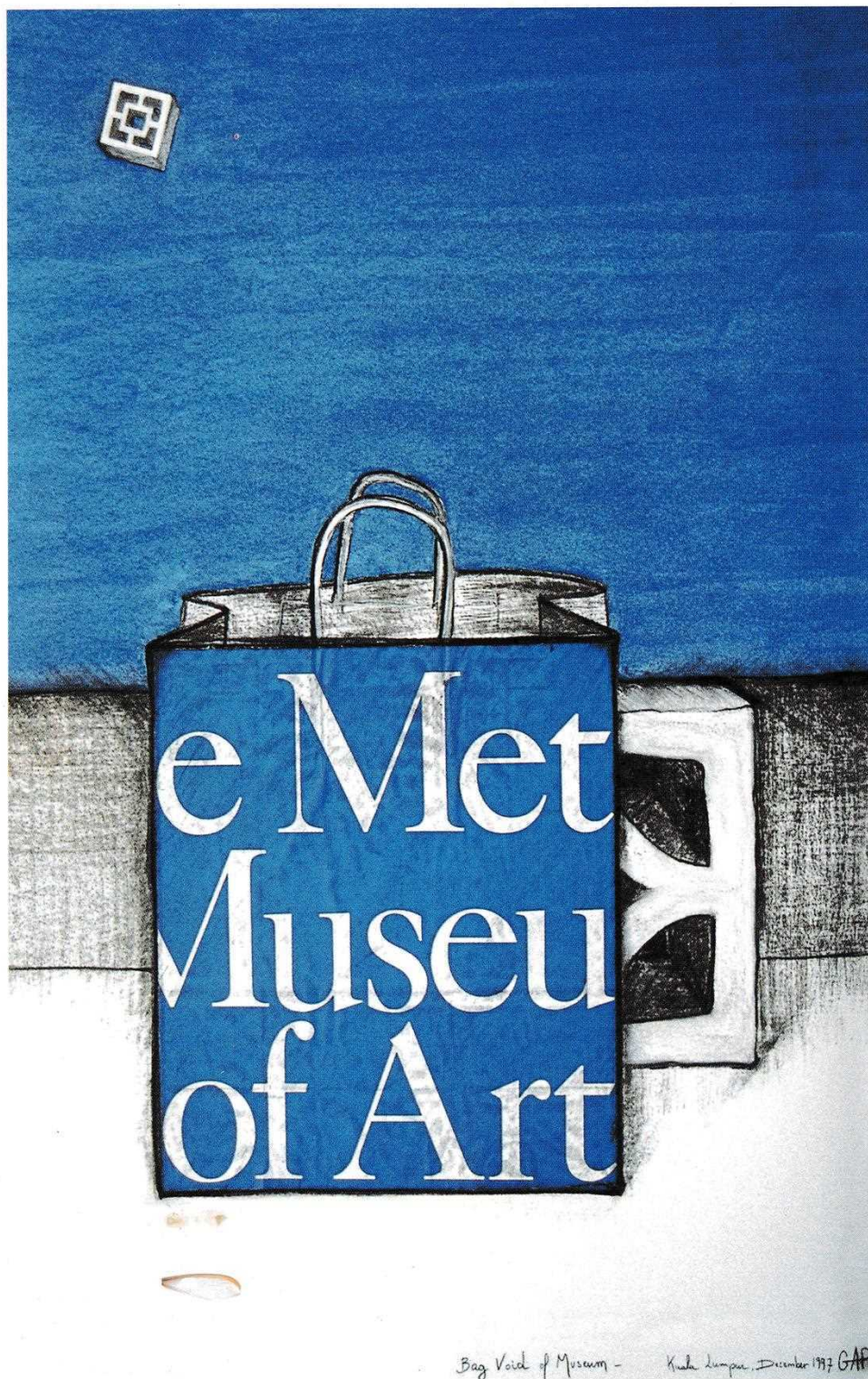
Bag Void of Museum, The Met

1997

Charcoal, blue ink, collage on

Holland white paper 300 g

100 x 65 cm



Bag cul-de-sac

1997

Charcoal, yellow ink, collage
on Holland white paper 300 g

65 x 100 cm



Homage

1997

Charcoal, ink, collage on
Holland white paper 300 g

65 x 100 cm



**Claustra devant le Jeu
de Paume**

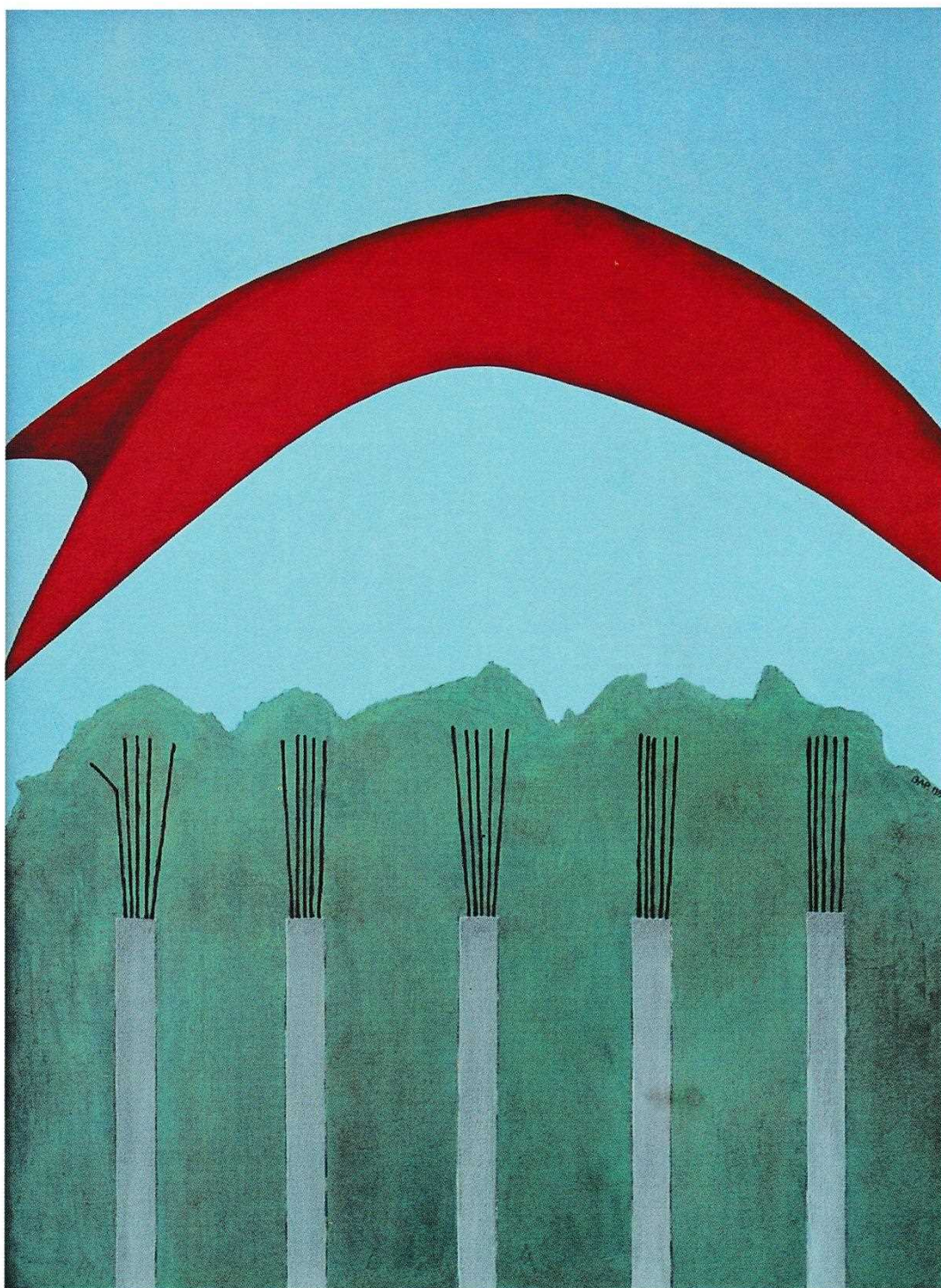
1991

Lithograph, numbered edition

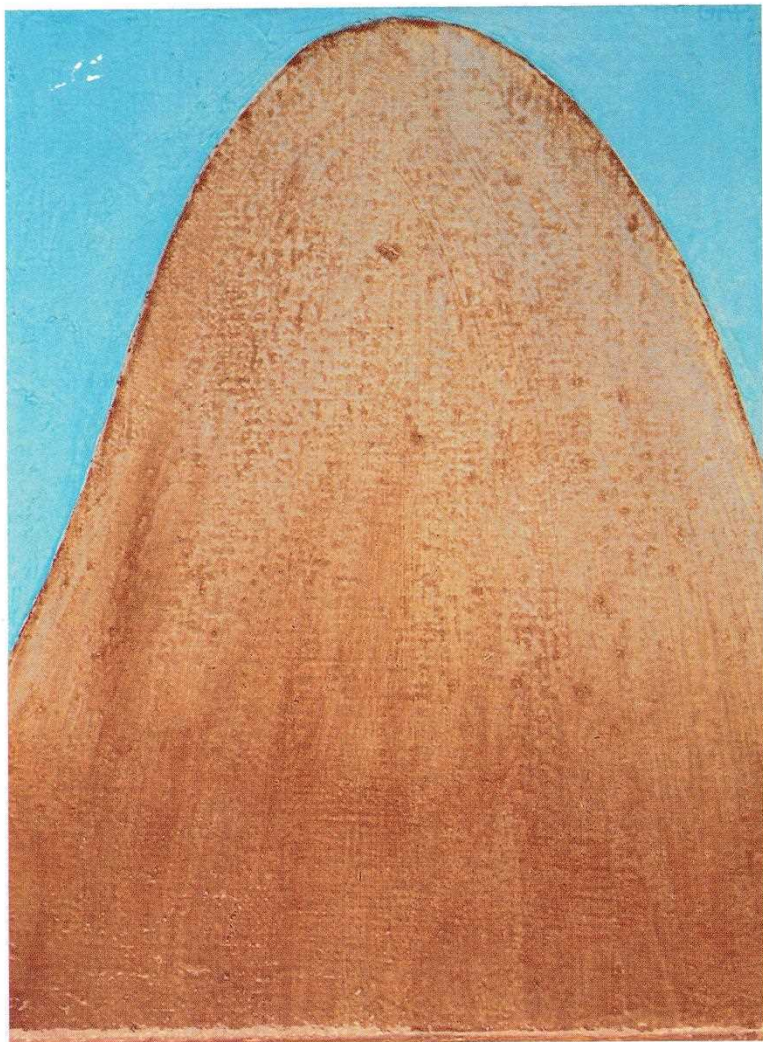
1-15; Arches white paper 350 g

160 x 120 cm





**Red tudung on the
new National Art Gallery
Jln Tun Razak #2**
1997
Oil, sand on linen
122 x 91.5 cm

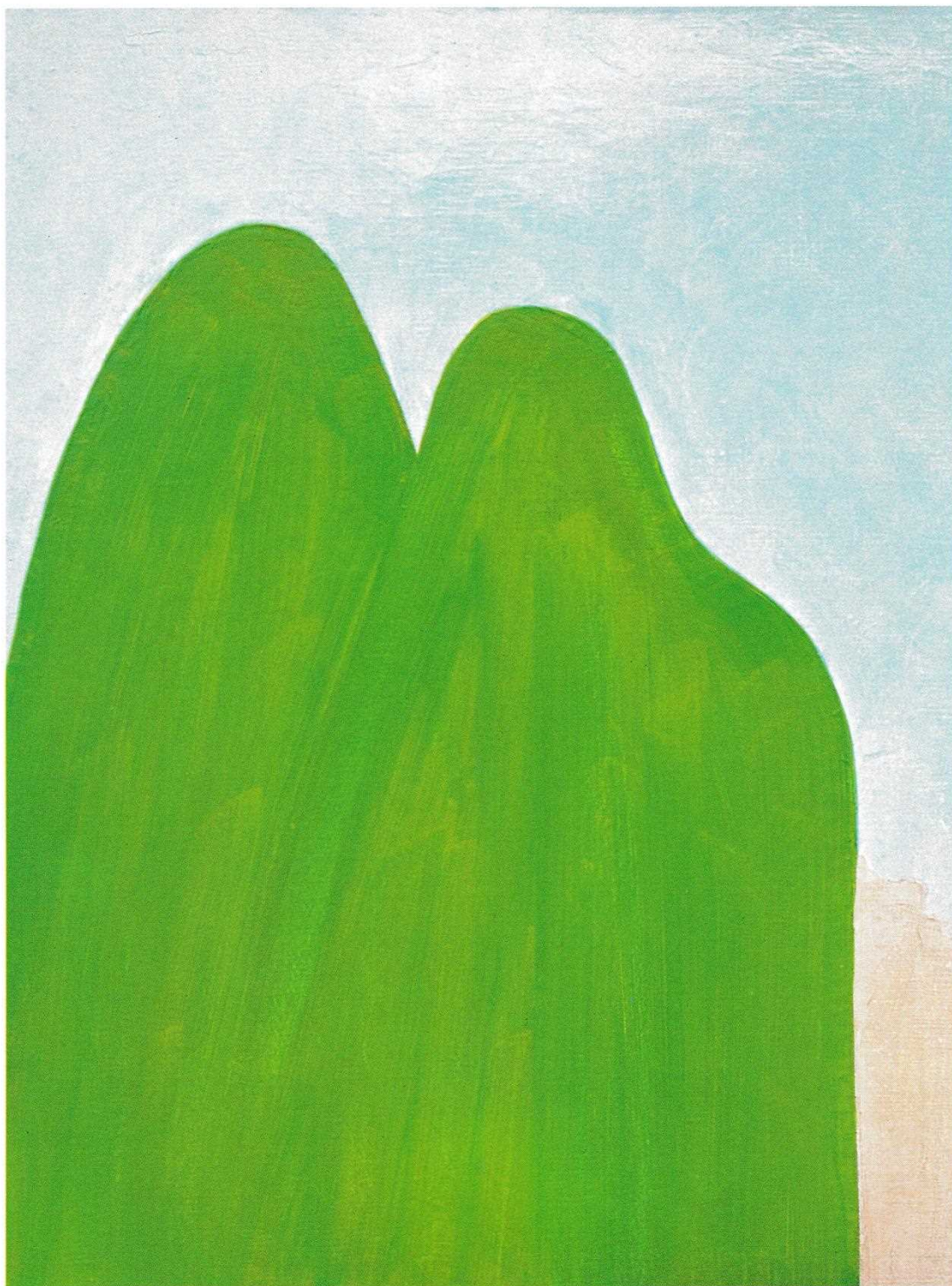


Pink tudung

1998

Oil on canvas

24.3 x 18.5 cm



2 green tudung

1998

Oil on linen

50 x 40 cm



Blue tudung & face

1998

Oil on canvas

25 x 25 cm

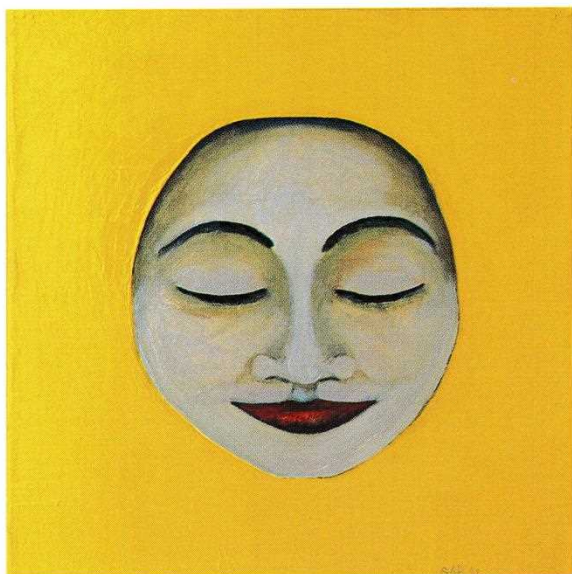


Green tudung & face

1998

Oil on canvas

25 x 25 cm



Yellow tudung & face

1998

Oil on canvas

25 x 25 cm



Red tudung & face

1997

Oil on canvas

25 x 25 cm



Chinese pillow

1997

Oil on canvas

25 x 25 cm

Malacca Chinese claustra

1998

Oil on linen

40 x 50 cm



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GRAP Stichting, The Hague, Netherlands

Valentine Willie Fine Art

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Malaysia <http://www.asiaconnect.com.my/vwart>

Southeast Asian Paintings & Works of Art

This exhibition will be opened by

HE Edouard Braine, Ambassador of the Republic of France

on Friday 3rd April, and will end on 25th April 1998.

Curated by Beverly Yong.