

DOUGLAS
MENDOZA





Dunstan

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Our fascination with contemporary art from South America began many years ago. Elisabeth and I travelled extensively through this beautiful continent, soaking up the breathtaking natural wonders, immersing ourselves in rich culture, and discovering passionate, powerful works of living artists. The desire to engage with new influences from this part of the world came from my curious and insatiable eye as art dealer, as well as my position as honorary consul of the Republic of Peru.

These experiences ultimately led to deep, enriching relationships with the artists Jose Carlos Ramos, Humberto Aquino and Willy Ramos, and now to our representation of Colombian based painter and sculptor Douglas Mendoza. This artist's fresh, vibrant work has captivated and elevated us anew, and I expect it will doubtlessly do the same for you.

Odon Wagner

ODON
WAGNER
GALLERY

Front Cover: MAR DE LA GUAJIRA (Guajira Sea), oil on canvas, 67 x 79 in. / 170 x 200 cm
Left: PAISAJE RECUERDO (Landscape Memory), oil on canvas, 67 x 79 in. / 170 x 200 cm

Visual Music: The Rhythmic Paintings of Douglas Mendoza

by Donald Brackett

Recently an artist friend remarked to me that “We can’t see radio waves, and yet we know that they exist. What if the same is true of both acoustic waves, and brain waves, maybe even telepathic vibrations?” Perhaps this person, who was an avid lover of fine painting, was also imagining a unique ability to see wavelengths and even translate them aesthetically into elegant visual images. Apart from all the marvels of the visible world around us, and the subtle quantum world within us, there are many things that can’t be seen, they can only be felt, like powerful music. In fact, I often refer to paintings as frozen music. It has also occurred to me that certain painters, those intrigued with space as time, have a deft skill at transmitting such *heartscapes*, customarily via oil on canvas. A heartscape can convey many things that a more realistic rendering cannot approach: childhood memories, almost forgotten dreams, evocative emotions, cherished hopes or secret wishes.

We all know what a landscape looks like. We also know what a landscape painting looks like: it usually looks like a landscape, even if it’s executed in a somewhat impressionistic or abstracted form. Abstract art, in the end, has to be *abstracted from* something, as the great de Kooning reminds us. And when I came upon the compelling large scale abstracts of Colombian painter Douglas Mendoza, my visceral reaction was immediate. *This* is

what a heartscape might look like. And further, I realized that in some mysterious way, I was *listening* to them with my eyes. Such was the case with his intensely arresting “Paisaje Recuerdo” (Landscape Memory), which at over six feet in scale is capable of almost absorbing the body of the viewer into its own ocular vistas. Not merely a painting depicting a landscape, it is *itself* a landscape, or more accurately, a reconfigured heartscape. This painter has the awesome ability, and the skill, to actually embody memories, even among viewers who do not possess them personally. Technically this is known as *Sehnsucht* or *Fernweh*, a nostalgic memory of a place we’ve never been, and to achieve it is an aesthetic feat of the highest order.

I’ve never been to Colombia, yet my eyes could *hear* its deep red echoes as evoked by the hand and heart of this gifted artist. Another of Mendoza’s operatic canvases has a similar vibration for us to savor: “Canta Claro en Rojo” (Singing Clearly in Red) offers a different choral verse in an intimately related song cycle. That alignment caused me to feel a distant visual affinity for a certain kind of cool jazz (indeed, many of his works collected here could easily be situated as album covers from the classic *Blue Note* label of the 50’s) but then I quickly realized that his personal vision is too hot for that idiom. Hot in the best possible way. Hot, the way Colombian

“A painting is music you can see, and music is a painting you can listen to.”

—Miles Davis

Andean music inspired their cultural identity as “land of a thousand rhythms” via such indigenous genres as chulupa, cumbia and vallenato. And hot, in the way that his masterful evocation “Paisaje de los Andes” (Landscape of the Andes), with its smoldering dark embers, fires our high altitude reveries of his homeland. So, far from being frozen music, his paintings have almost become not just fluid but also sheer visual steam.

Born in the small town of Canaverales, La Guajira, the artist grew up surrounded the towering peaks of the Andes, an origin that emerges time and time again in majestic works such as “Montaña” (Mountain). The geography of his imagination is clearly fueled by shimmering recollections of nocturnal roaming amidst those awesome peaks. This work’s sensual indigo sky is riddled with interacting fragments of fire that feel like shooting stars explosively entering our atmosphere. It is also a poetic reminder that every single rhythmic painting in this curated selection is basically a sacred meditation on the four elements that nourished his roots. Earth, air, fire and water are not just being celebrated in his paintings, even though there is much dancing depicted, but almost prayed to. And with the addition of an unnamable fifth element, let’s just call it an ancestral spirit, Mendoza’s map of his memories, dreams and reflections unfolds with a rare grace.

With his studio and home based in bustling Bogota now, his heart still resonates with the natural energies of the Andes. And while several of his works explore that locale at the macro level, conveying the grandeur of an aerial view of those lofty altitudes, several others approach the natural environment from a more close up and human scale. This is the case for instance in a trio of pieces alluding to our first-hand interaction with nature and all those who share its beauty. “Después de la lluvia” (After the Rain), “Camino al río” (Road to the River), “Camino al río II”, and “Gran Pajaro” (Great Bird) celebrate the sensual party that is the natural world and our also fellow inhabitants of its splendid organic concert halls. The place where all this magical music originates and floats into our individual and collective lives. It’s especially evident in the charming pair of “Roads to the River”, two very subtle paintings which are charmingly playful in form and content, almost tongue in cheek in their presentation of nature’s energy, but still utterly captivating in their aesthetic agenda. Indeed, almost bordering the fanciful zone in between painting and haptic feeling, and comprising both, what these works play with is our eyes themselves, and also with our expectations. Some art is made for the mind, some is made for the heart, occasionally some might even be made for the spirit. These are for all three.

The “Rain” and “Bird” pieces also appear to invite us into the spiritual domain of dreams, as mystery abounds in their glittering spectacles, one provoking a deep relaxed state by allowing the eye and heart to align in a nearly hypnotic state of attention. They are another suite of sonata-like paintings which share a mutual palette and colour tonality that links them as members of the same family, as in siblings or cousins, and as such they reward the viewer who takes them in together as a kind of visual symphony, shifting attention from one to the next and back again. In some salient and poetic ways, this gifted painter’s perspective traverses the viewer from the macro-level of mountains, roads and rivers, to the micro-organic level of the plant kingdom so important to the Andean people.

Such is the case with “Frailejón” (an endangered plant growing at high elevations in the Andes); “Flor Exótica” (exotic flowers); “Flor Mística” (mystical flowers). “Colibri” (Hummingbird) and “Amanecer” (Sunrise), “Nido” (Nest) and “Nido pájaro alujeo” (Nest of the Blue Bird). This latter cluster of jewels in the mountainous crown invite us to contemplate something immaterial and sacred, something which lurks *behind* the veil of the physical world we so busily occupy daily. Hovering apparitions. Their cyclonic force fields give the push and pull of abstraction a new and quite literal meaning: receding

and advancing physically before us like a secret storm at the centre of seeing. We gaze into their depths in order to discern the true essence of our own characters. They are, to me, obviously fever dreams, purveyors of thresholds entering a whole new territory-reality.

They don’t need to tell a story, we *are* the story they tell, and what we see is what we see. It’s also who we are, a part of the natural environment we frequently gaze at. Upon reflection, most viewers will be able to accept the observation that these are implicitly landscape oriented paintings. Not *pictures* of landscapes but rather actual perceptual fields. Perhaps in the end, they are also interior weather reports. “Frailejón” certainly feels that way to me. The artist takes aspects or elements of nature and landscape, of light, of horizons, of fields, of stone, of water, but rather than representing them directly or literally he uses their essential and even spiritual raw materials to construct phenomenal experiences of transcendence. These paintings do indeed feel like optical singing to me. The eyes *listen* to them like splendid durational depictions in which any traditional figure and ground relationships are merged and become virtually indistinguishable. He is thus a painter at play in fields of vision where the present moment suddenly comes abruptly and vividly into focus. And it is a present moment utterly consumed by pure colour.

“Even abstract shapes must have a likeness.”

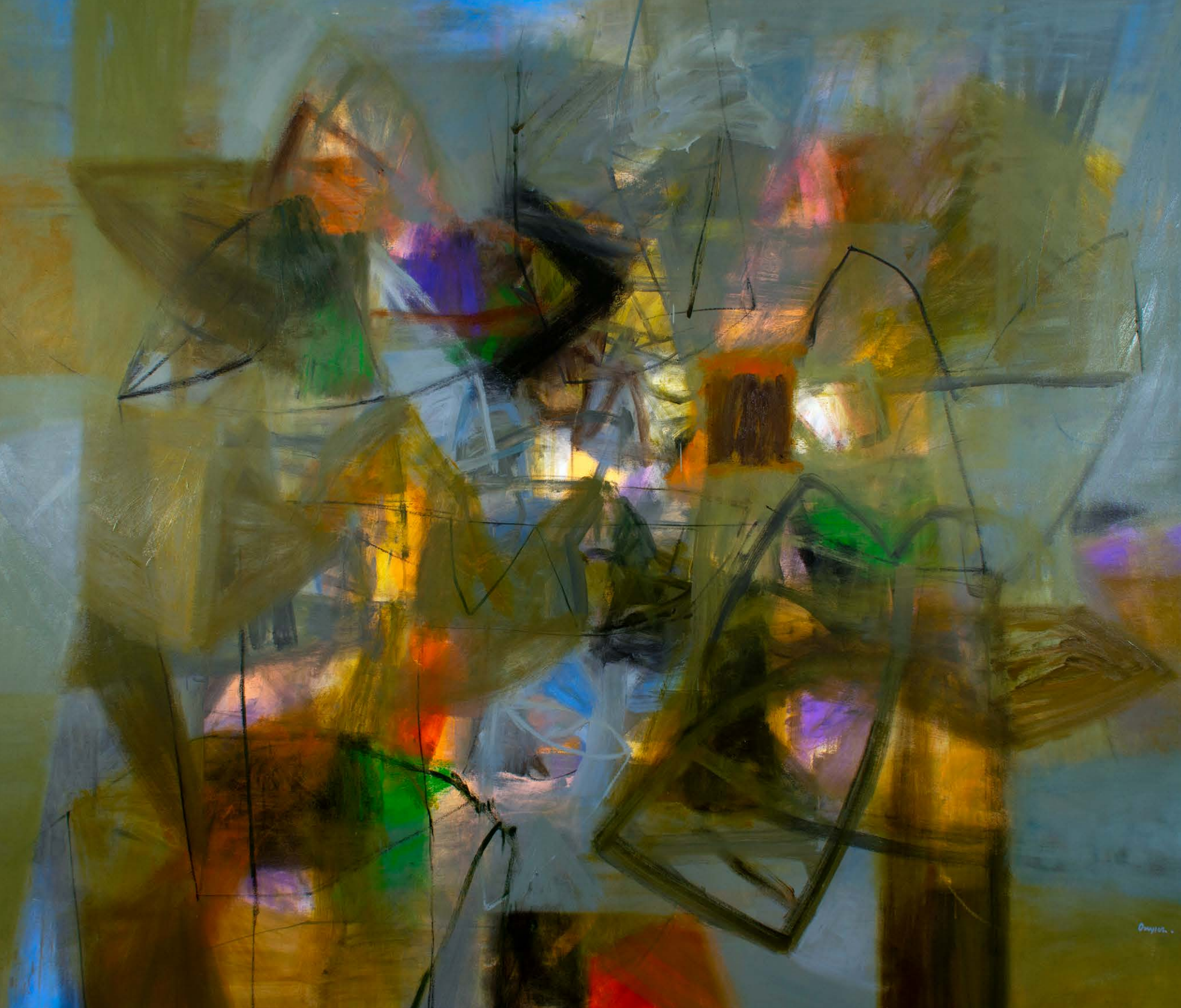
—Willem de Kooning

The artist’s son Jharol Mendoza, a film student at York University, has made two short films about his father’s painting ethos and the process he uses to embody it. They struck me as tenderly touching in their presentation of “a trip into his father’s memories as a means of understanding his work”. In one, “Entre Nosotros (Among Us)”, I was particularly struck by his filming of Douglas at work from the beginning to the end of a single canvas. He started by staring intensely at an empty canvas, caressing it lovingly with dry palms as if to pick up a message through his fingertips. In the end, he is using a palette knife, not to add more paint in the customary manner but to remove it by scraping away, by excavating what was already there. That image persisted in my mind as an emblem of his relationship with painterly time and duration, and it coincided with another friend’s observation in one of his stories, through a strange sort of synchronicity.

“Words stagger under the weight of time, under inadequate metaphors of space. Our language asks us to look forward to the future. But for the Andean people, it is reversed. The future is behind us and always has been. Imagine you are in a boat, looking forward, drifting downstream. What is to be comes towards you. Turn about and face upstream. A simple pivot. The future is now behind you. It always was always there. You’ll see and hear how the past is always *before* you.” In some

uncanny way, Mendoza’s task is the reconciliation of the future and the past in each and every one of his splendid canvases. There is a palpable joy evident in these rhythmic Mendoza works being featured here in his inaugural exhibition at the Odon Wagner Gallery (a dealer who astutely refers to them as “vibrant and hopeful compositions”) as well as being his first ever showing in Canada.

The issue of diverse scales, (in smaller works such as “Viento Marino”/Sea Wind, “Danza”/Dance, and “Paloma”/Dove for instance) and of the shifting intimacies that result, had a profound impact on me, as it seemed to confirm an intuition that small, medium and large canvases of such a soulful nature tend to elicit a recognition of our own varying vantage points. We are thus positioned perceptually: inside, close to, nearby, far away from, and far above, in a skillful manner which subtly suggests that each landscape, or heartscape, is also a still life of nature and even perhaps a portrait of its energy or spirit. Such a unison of vision is a rare gift indeed, as is the sheer pleasure of encountering such a sensual banquet spread out so seductively before us. So, in rare situations such as this, my inclination is that we should all listen carefully to what we’re seeing, and clearly hear what the canvases are telling us. Each and every one of them is singing.



Omigton

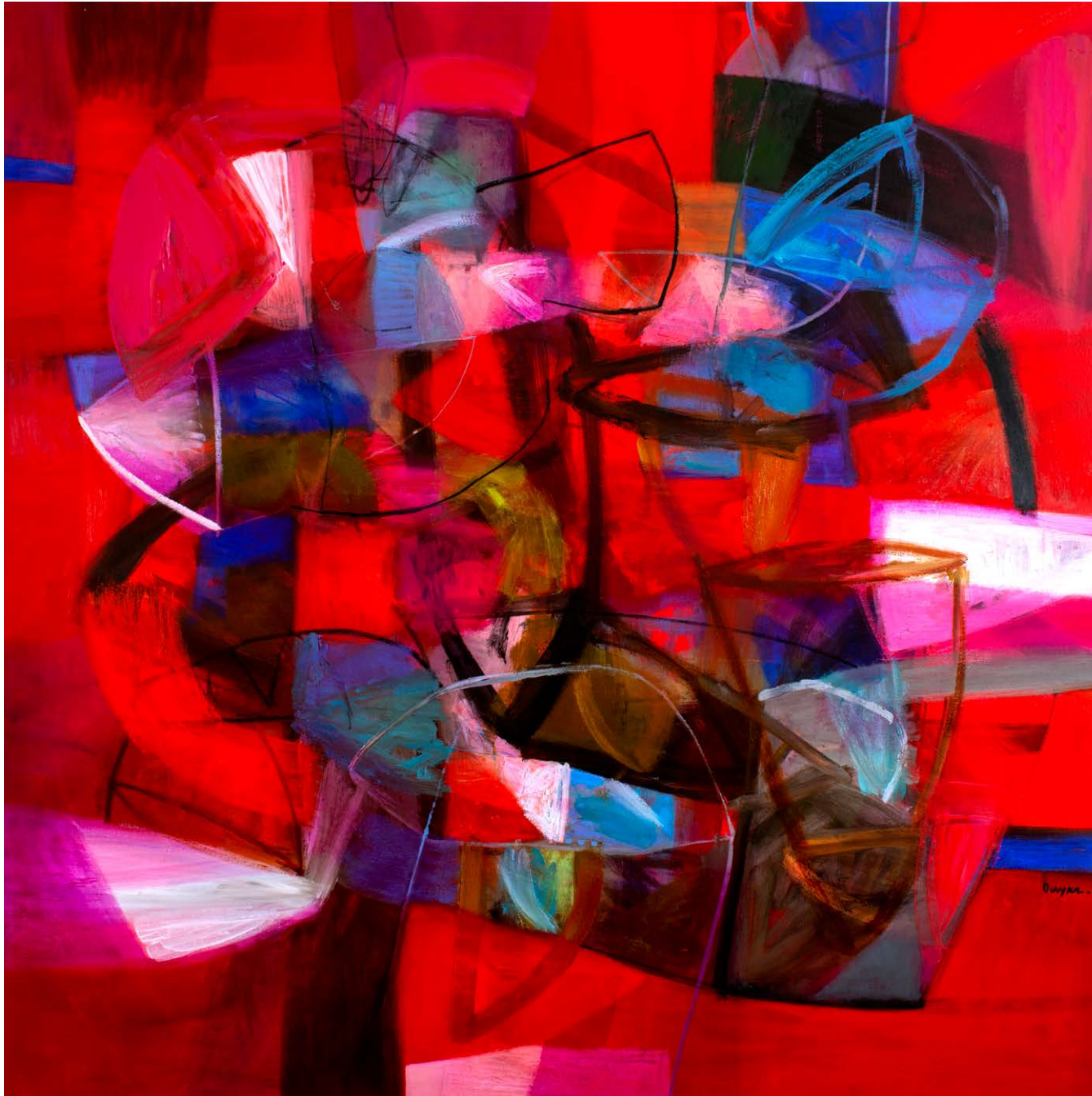
“Some art is made for the mind, some is made for the heart, occasionally some might even be made for the spirit. Mendoza’s are for all three.”

FRAILEJÓN, oil on canvas, 67 x 79 in. / 170 x 200 cm



“We should all listen carefully to what we’re seeing, and clearly hear what the canvases are telling us. Each and every one of them is singing.”

PAISAJE DE LOS ANDES (Landscape of the Andes), oil on canvas, 67 x 79 in. / 170 x 200 cm



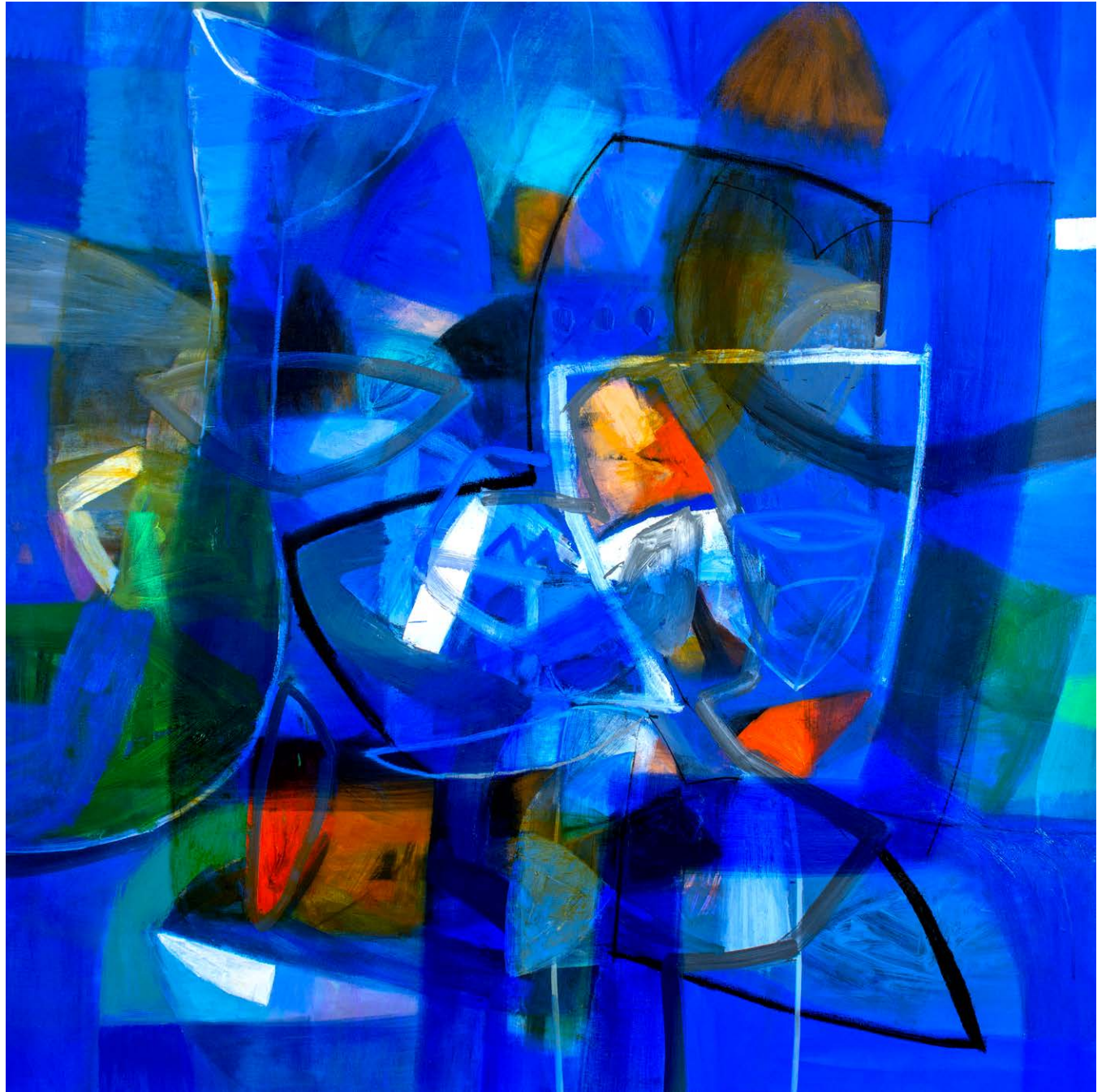
CANTA CLARO EN ROJO (Singing Clearly in Red), oil on canvas, 59 x 59 in. / 150 x 150 cm



DESPUÉS DE LA ILUVIA (After the Rain), oil on canvas, 59 x 59 in. / 150 x 150 cm



FLOR EXÓTICA (Exotic Flower), oil on canvas, 59 x 59 in. / 150 x 150 cm



FLOR MÍSTICA (Mystical Flower), oil on canvas, 59 x 59 in. / 150 x 150 cm



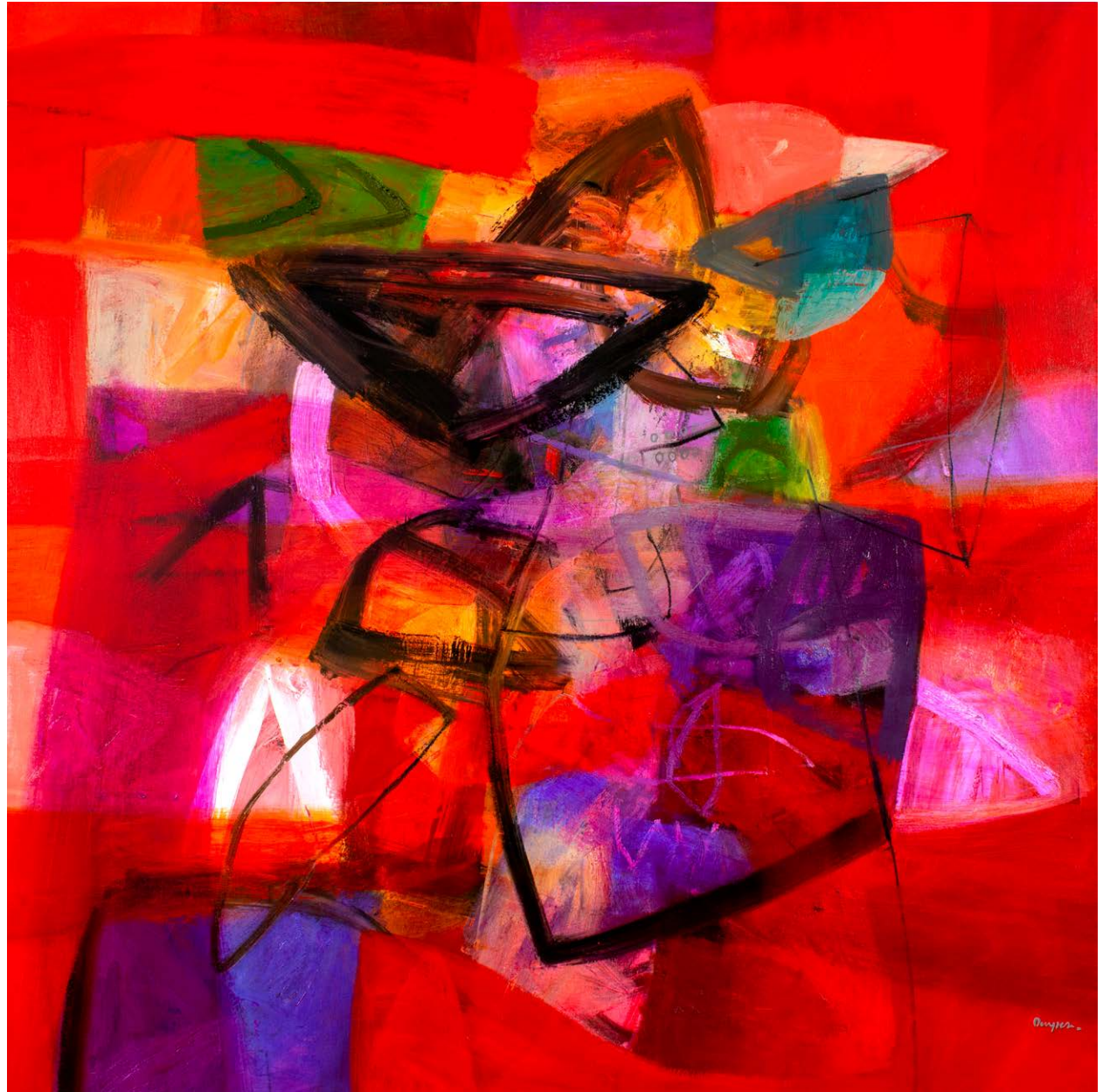
FLORES FRENTE AL RIO (Flowers by the River), oil on canvas, 59 x 59 in. / 150 x 150 cm



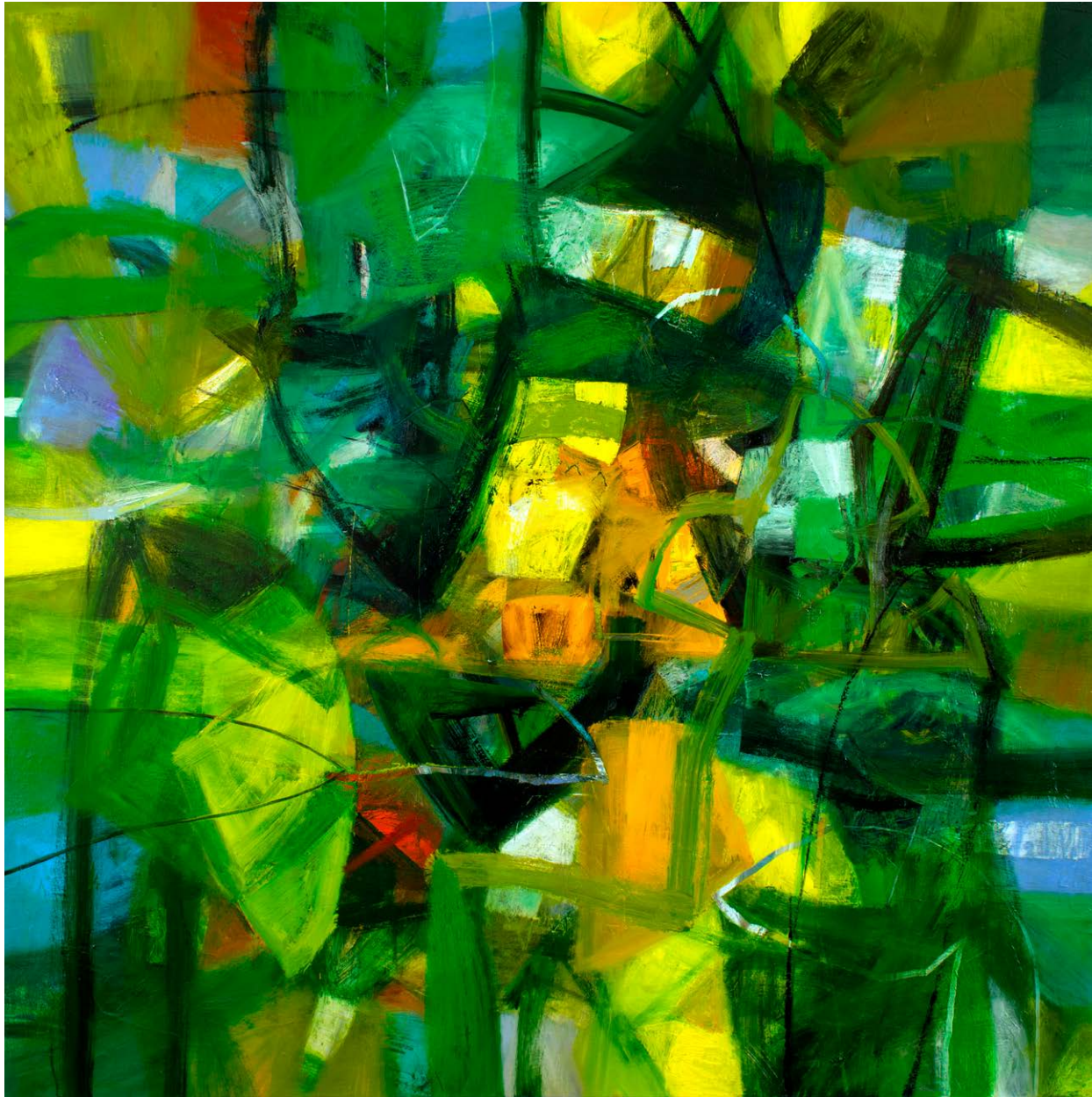
GRAN PAJARO (Great Bird), oil on canvas, 59 x 59 in. / 150 x 150 cm



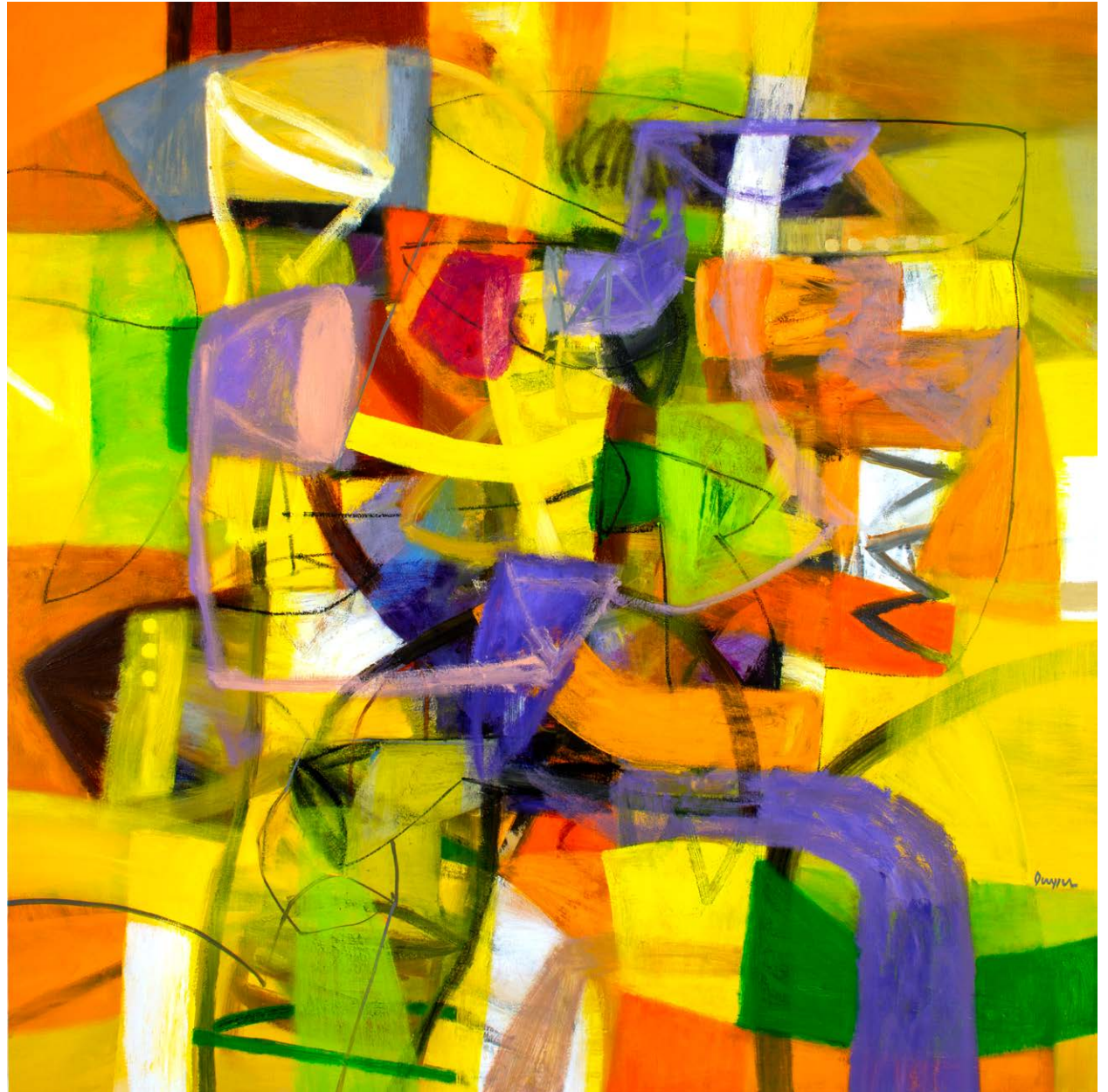
CAMINO AL RÍO II (Road to the River II), oil on canvas, 47 x 47 in. / 120 x 120 cm



COLIBRÍ (Hummingbird), oil on canvas, 47 x 47 in. / 120 x 120 cm



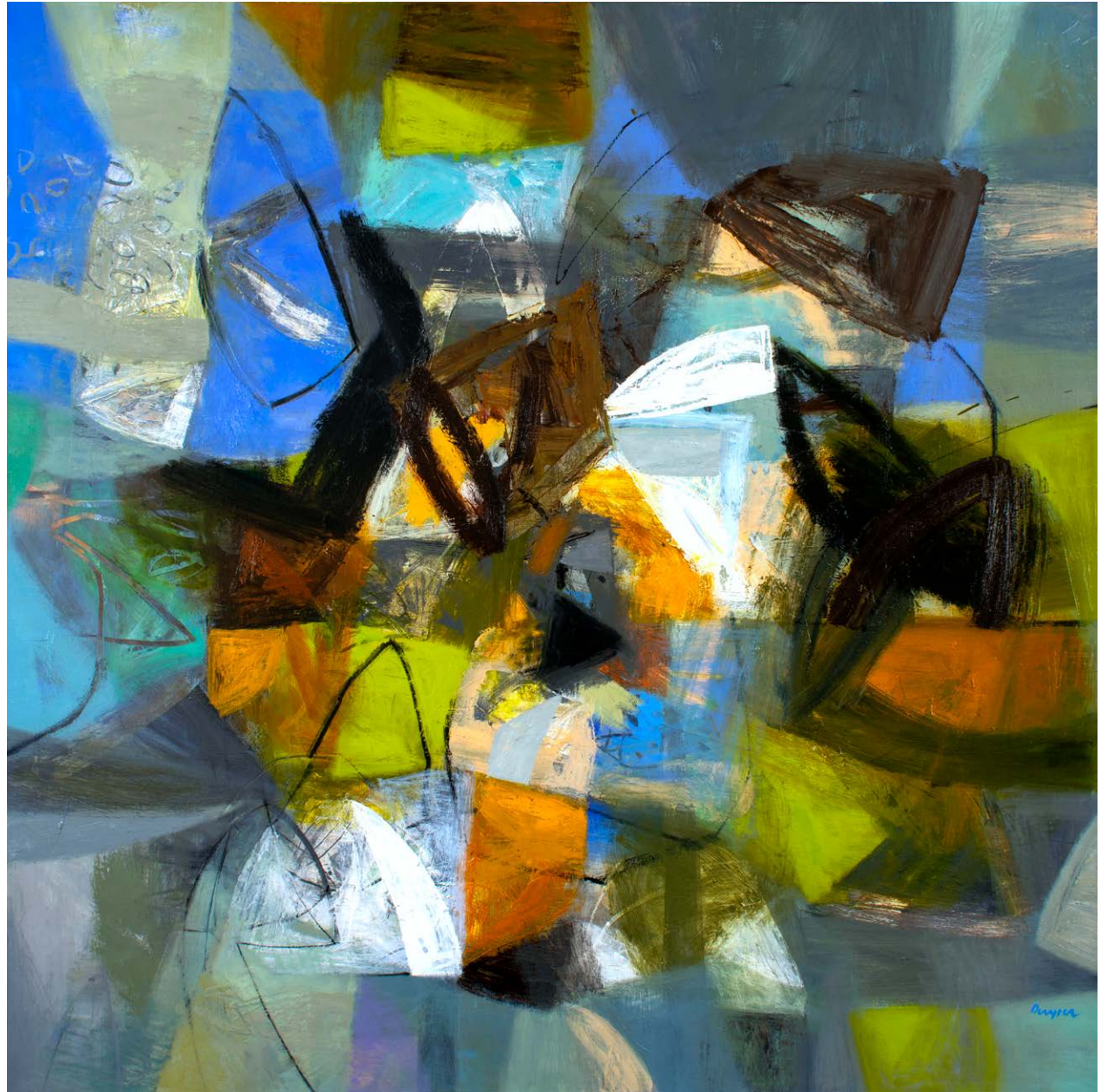
EL RÍO (The River), oil on canvas, 47 x 47 in. / 120 x 120 cm



FIESTA (Party), oil on canvas, 47 x 47 in. / 120 x 120 cm



MONTANA EL AMAZONAS (The Amazon Mountain), oil on canvas, 47 x 47 in. / 120 x 120 cm



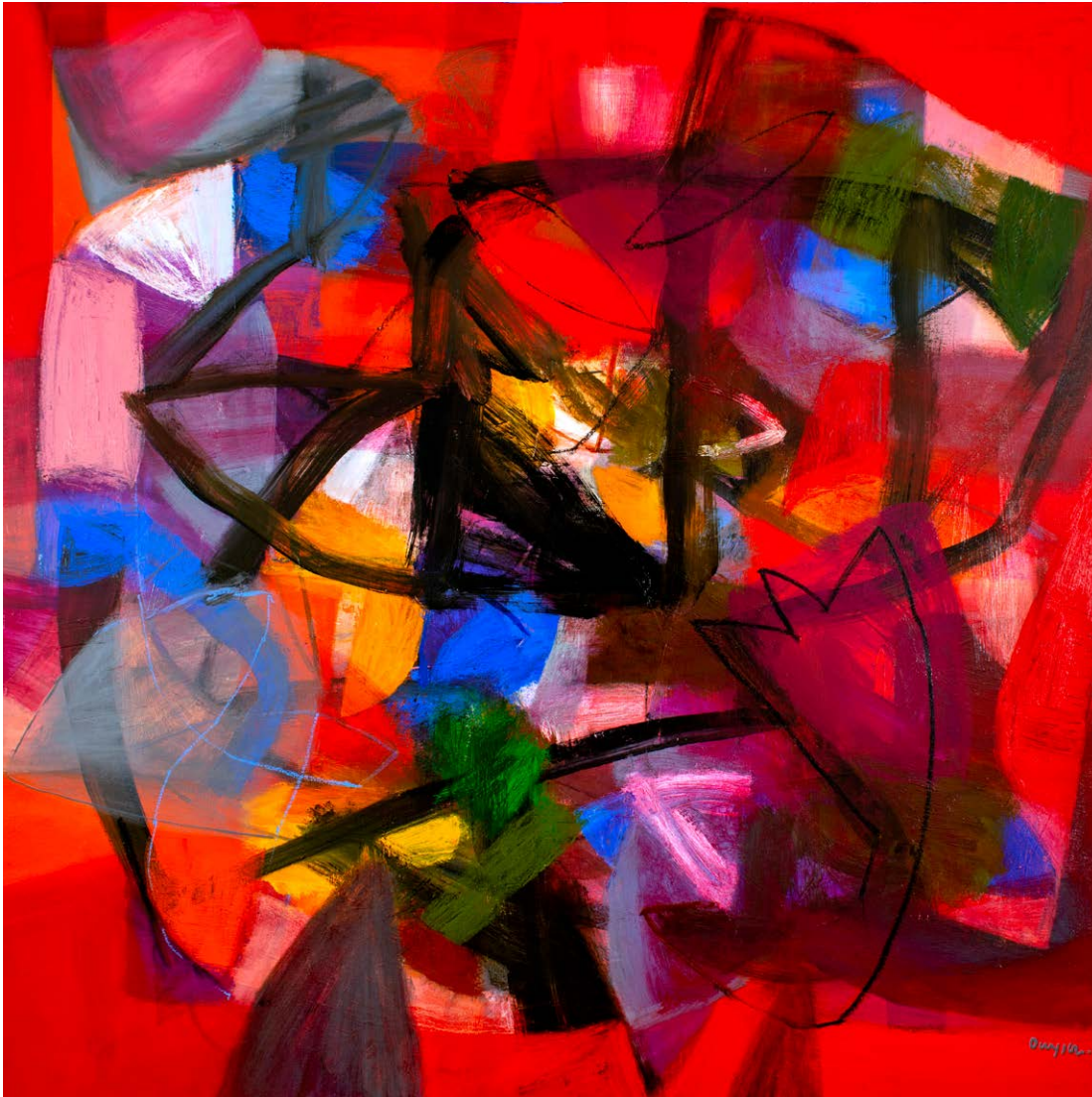
NIDO (Nest), oil on canvas, 47 x 47 in. / 120 x 120 cm



NIDO DE PÁJARO AZULEJO (Nest of the Blue Bird), oil on canvas, 47 x 47 in. / 120 x 120 cm



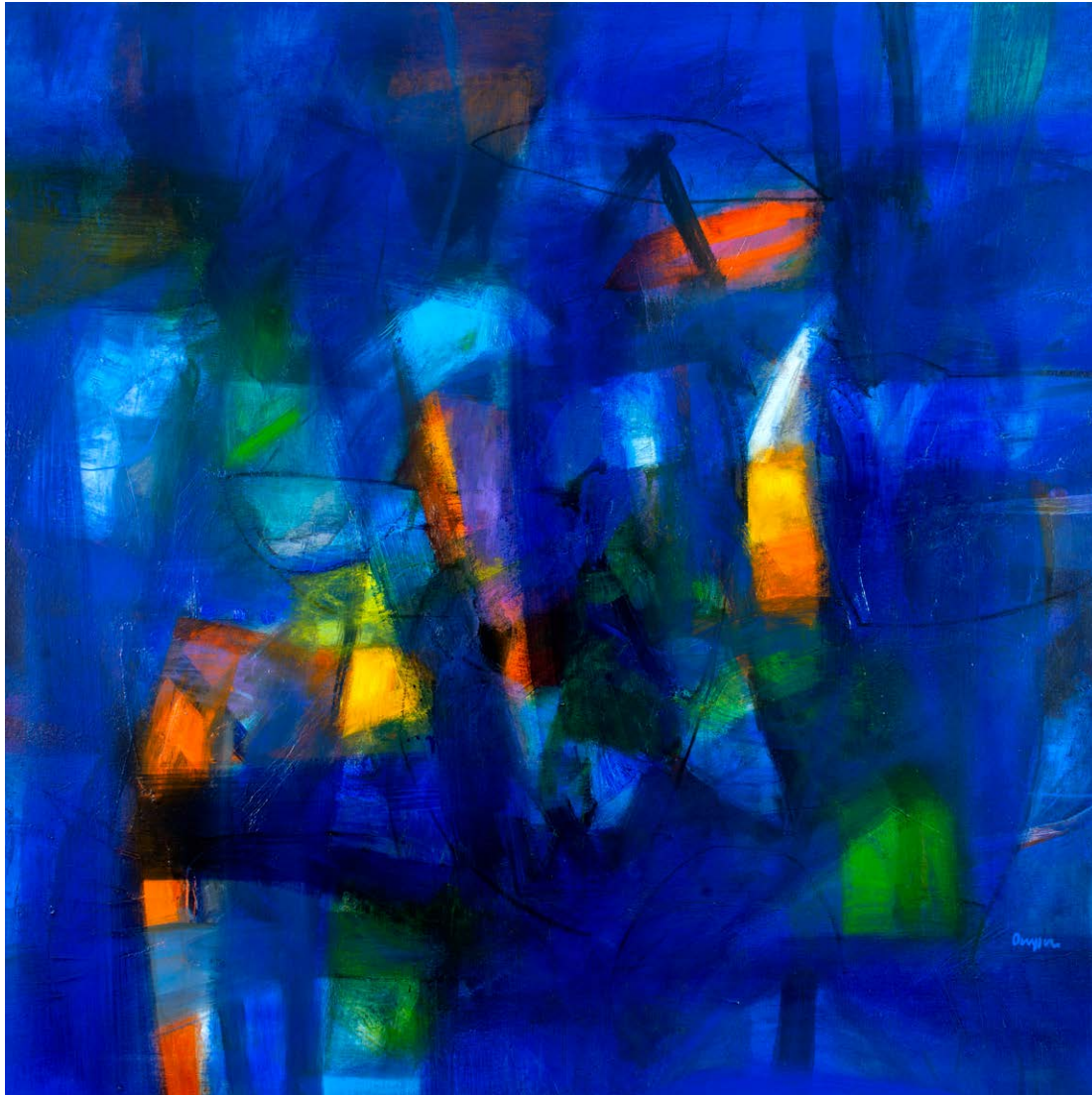
TRÓPICO (Tropic), oil on canvas, 47 x 47 in. / 120 x 120 cm



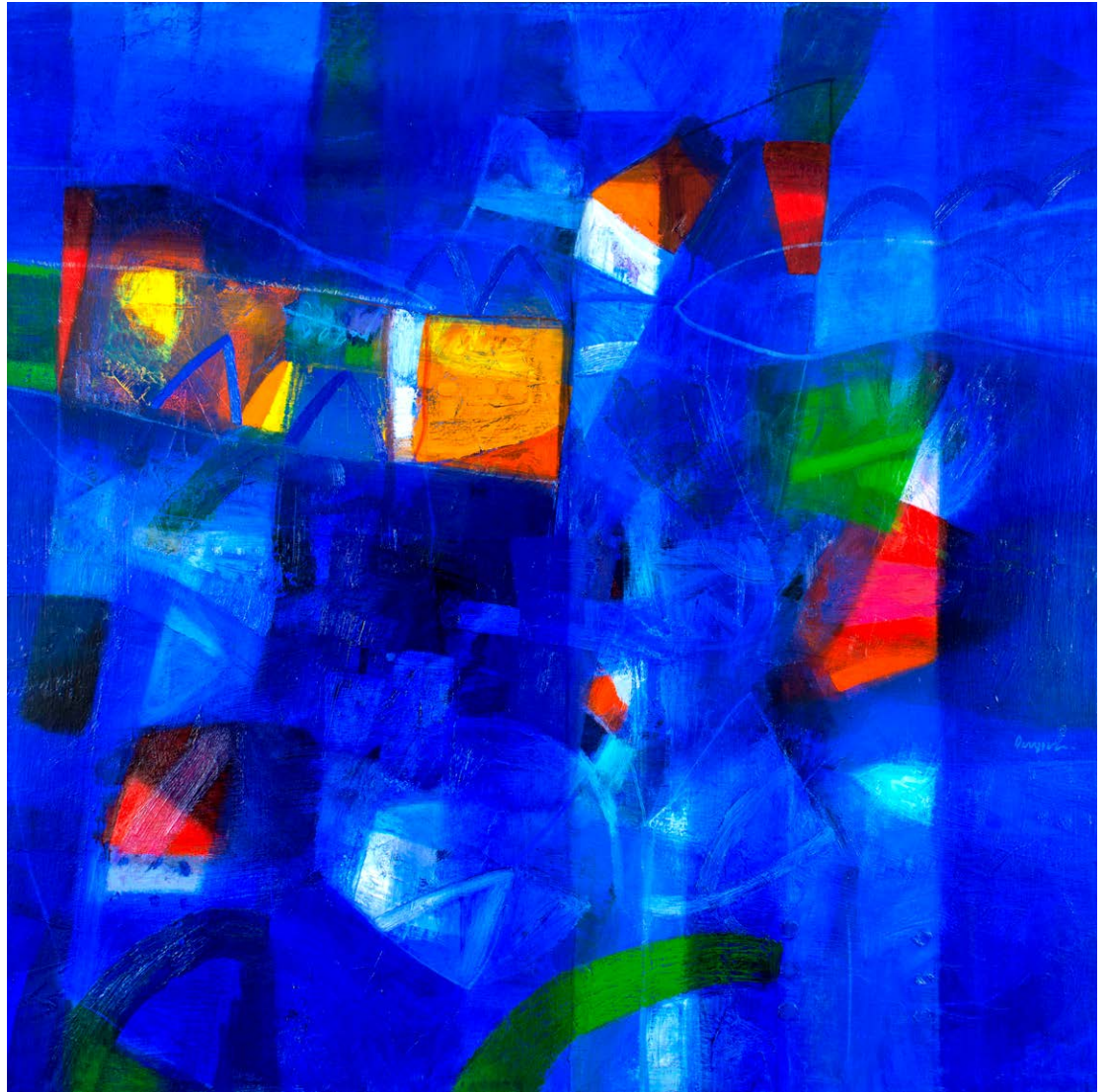
DANZA (Dance), oil on canvas, 39 x 39 in. / 100 x 100 cm



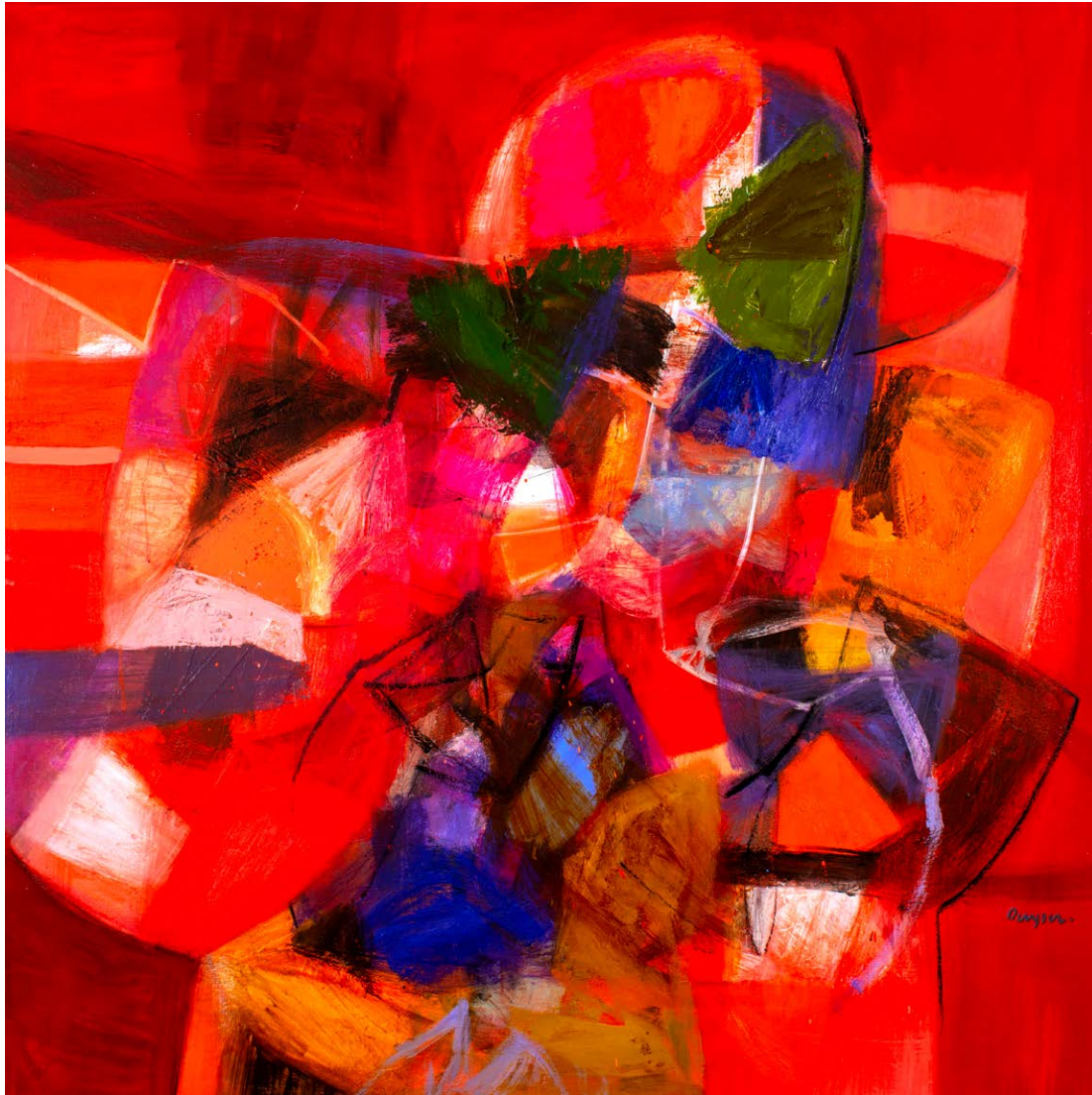
FLOR NARANJA (Orange Flower), oil on canvas, 39 x 39 in. / 100 x 100 cm



MAR AZUL (Blue Sea), oil on canvas, 39 x 39 in. / 100 x 100 cm



MAR CARIBE (Caribbean Sea), oil on canvas, 39 x 39 in. / 100 x 100 cm



PAJARITO ROJO (Little Red Bird), oil on canvas, 39 x 39 in. / 100 x 100 cm



PALOMA (Dove), oil on canvas, 39 x 39 in. / 100 x 100 cm

DOUGLAS MENDOZA

b. 1972 in La Guajira, Colombia

SOLO EXHIBITIONS (since 2000)

- 2023 Odon Wagner Gallery, Toronto, Canada
- 2022 Museo de Arte Moderno de Bucaramanga, Colombia
- 2020 Museo de Arte del Tolima, Ibagué, Colombia
- 2019 “Geografía del color” Gallery Fernando Vilchis, Xalapa, México
- 2018 “El grito silente del color” Museo del Pueblo de Guanajuato, México
- 2016 “Pintura” Gallery Arte Actual, Bogotá, Colombia
- 2015 “La persistente vigencia de la pintura” Montealegre Gallery, Bogotá, Colombia
- 2010 LGM Arte Internacional Gallery, Bogotá, Colombia
- 2009 Elite Art Editions Gallery, Miami, USA
- 2008 Ramírez Sánchez Gallery, Bucaramanga, Colombia
- 2007 Elite Art Editions Gallery, Miami, USA
- 2006 Gallery Duque Arango, Medellín, Colombia
- 2006 Museo El Chicó, Bogotá, Colombia
- 2005 Cultural Center Andrés Bello, Bogotá, Colombia
- 2003 BAOBAB Gallery of Art, Bogotá, Colombia
- 2002 Goyas Galería de Arte, Bogotá, Colombia
- 2002 Gallery Vaandermaal, Madrid, España
- 2001 Museo Bolivariano, Santa Marta, Colombia
- 2000 “Pinturas” Gallery El Telar, Barranquilla, Colombia

GROUP EXHIBITIONS (since 2000)

- 2019 Design Weekend Fair, Sao Paulo, Brazil
- 2017 Art Miami International Art Fair, Miami, USA
- 2017 “Un Alma Tiene Vida” Gallery Alma, Bogotá, Colombia
- 2017 Feria Internacional de Arte de Medellín (ARTMED), Medellín, Colombia

2015 Feria de Arte ARTCHICO, Bogotá, Colombia
2014 Feria de Arte SINCRONIA, Bogotá, Colombia
2012 LGM Gallery, Bogotá, Colombia
2011 Shanghai Art Fair, LGM Arte Internacional, Shanghai, China
2010 Art Fair, LGM, Korean International Art Fair (KIAF), Seoul, South Korea
2010 Shangdu Art Museum, Zhengzhou, China
2009 Big APPLE, Big ART, New York, USA
2009 Art Shanghai, LGM, Arte Internacional, Shanghai, China
2008 Art Miami, Miami, USA
2007 “Visiones” Casa de la Cultura, Valledupar, Colombia
2007 Feria Internacional de Arte ARTBO, Bogotá, Colombia
2007 Elite Art @ Art Wynwood, Miami, USA
2006 Gallery Arte Acuavella, Caracas, Venezuela
2006 Feria Internacional de Arte ARTBO, Bogotá, Colombia
2006 “Pinturas” Museo El Chicó, Bogotá, Colombia
2005 Elite Art Editions Gallery, Miami, USA
2004 The Wall Gallery, Bogotá, Colombia
2004 Euro Bank Expo Fine Art, Miami, USA
2004 “Nuevos Nombres” Gallery La Pared, Bogotá, Colombia
2003 Goyas Gallery, Bogotá, Colombia
2001 El taller de los Artistas, Valledupar, Colombia
2000 Candfield Gallery, Boca Ratón, Florida

MUSEUM COLLECTIONS

Museo del Pueblo de Guanajuato, Mexico
Tolima Museum, Colombia

CREDITS

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Back Cover: GRAN PAJARO (Great Bird), oil on canvas, 59 x 59 in. / 150 x 150 cm

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