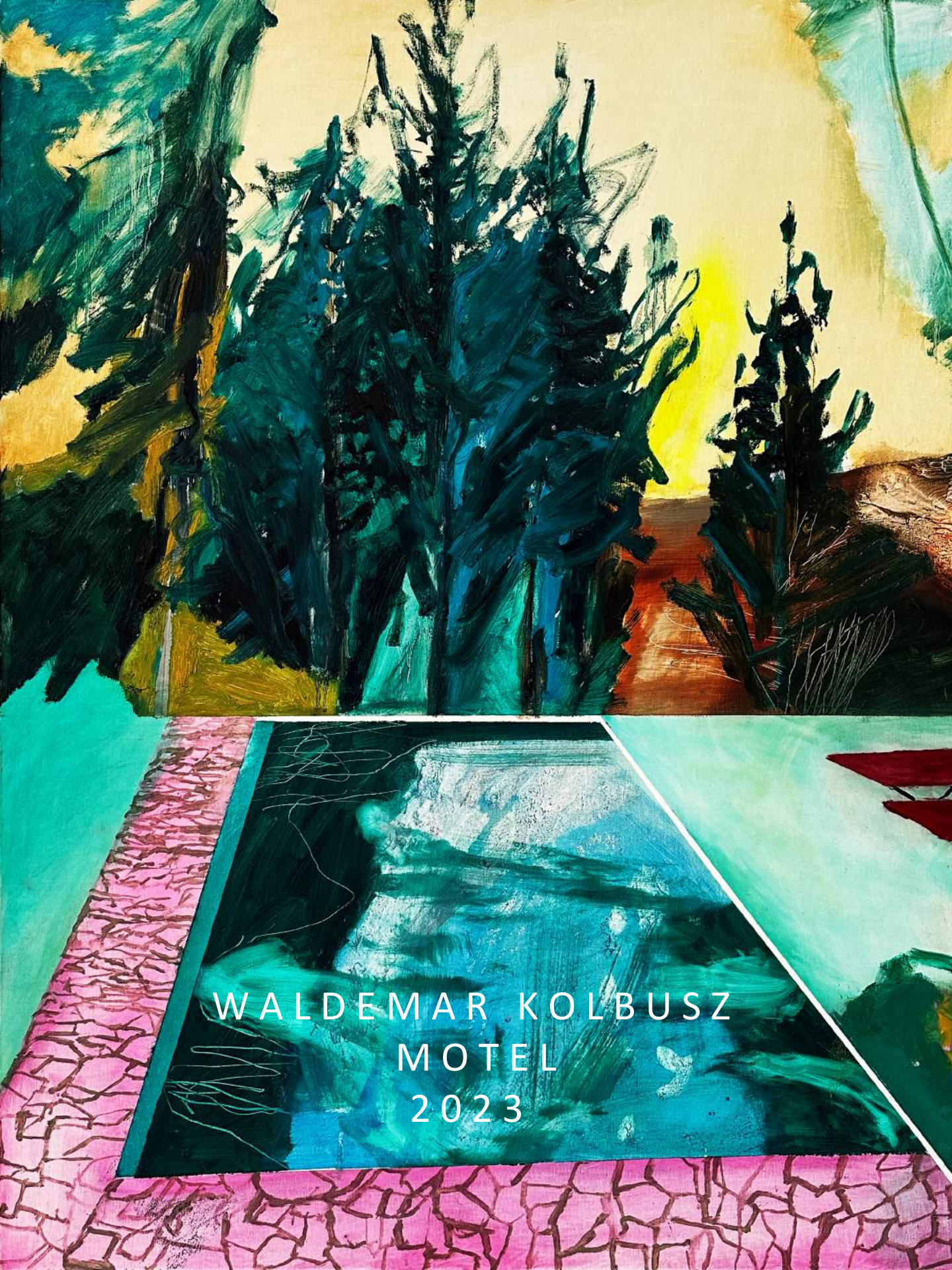
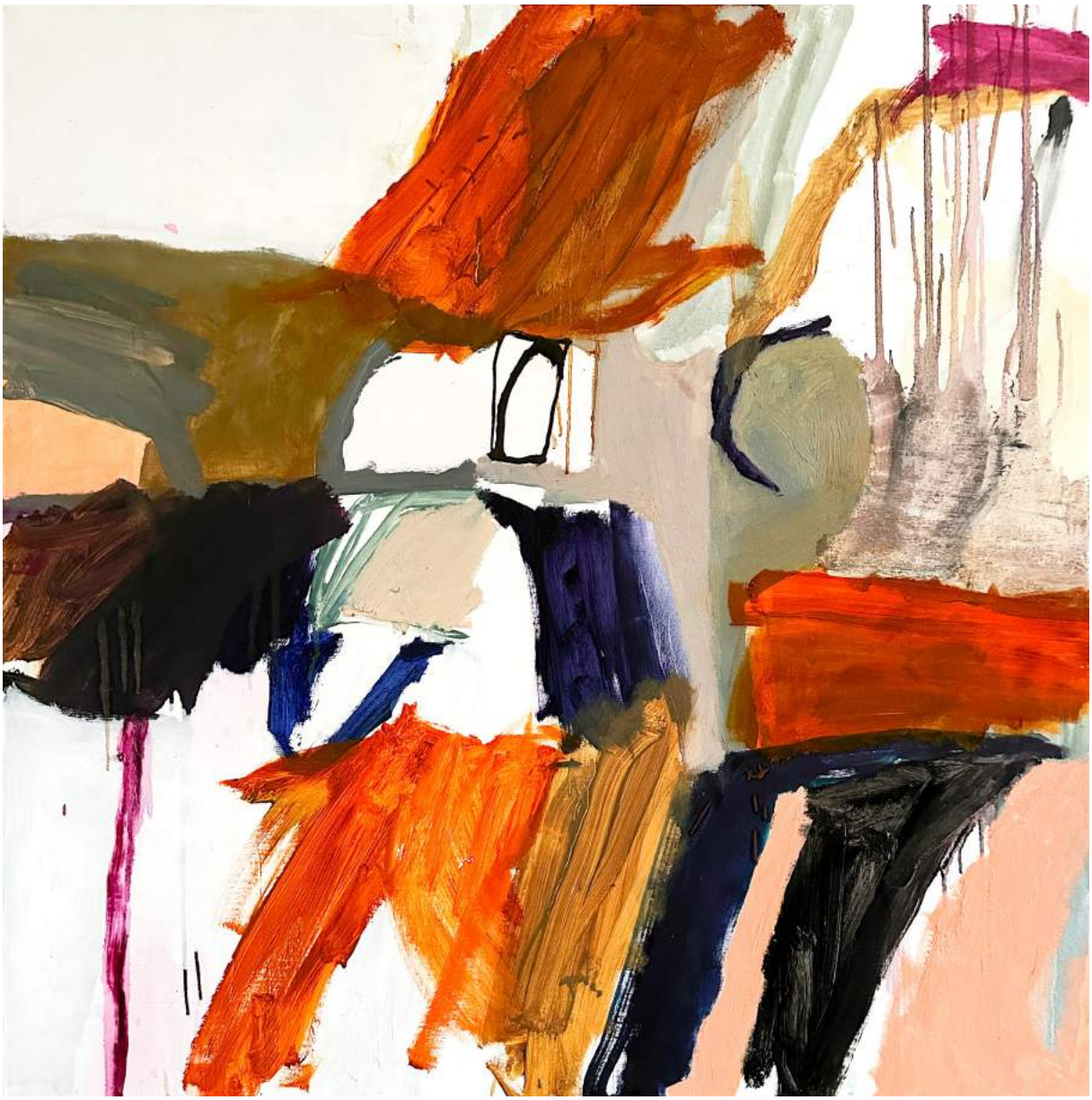

WALDEMAR KOLBUSZ
MOTEL
2023

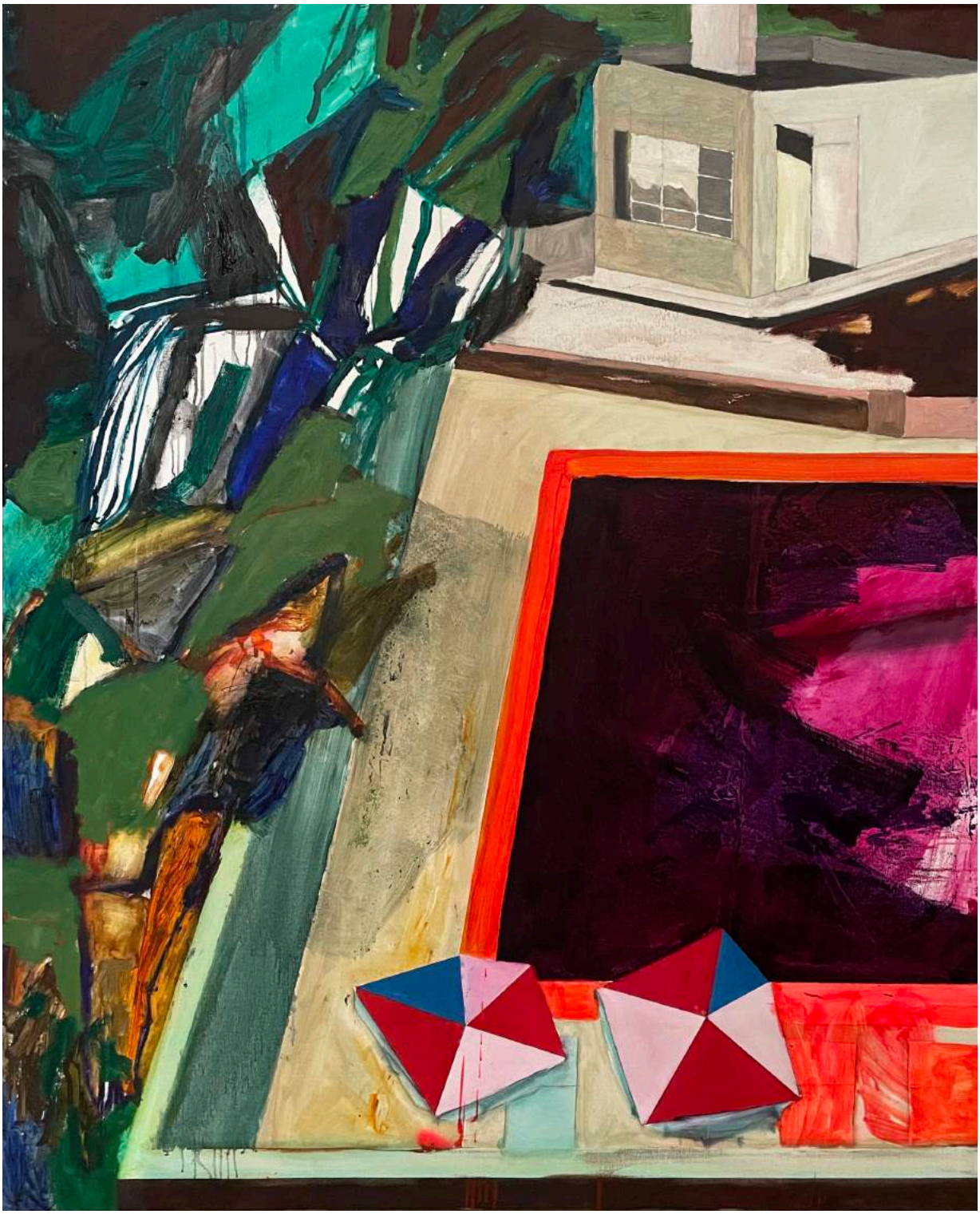
Waldemar KOLBUSZ. Deep End. Oil on linen, 101 x 153CM. A$ 14,000

Waldemar KOLBUSZ. *Motel*. Oil on linen, 153 x 213CM. A$ 26,000

Waldemar KOLBUSZ. *Infinity*. Oil on linen, 183 x 138CM. A$ 18,000

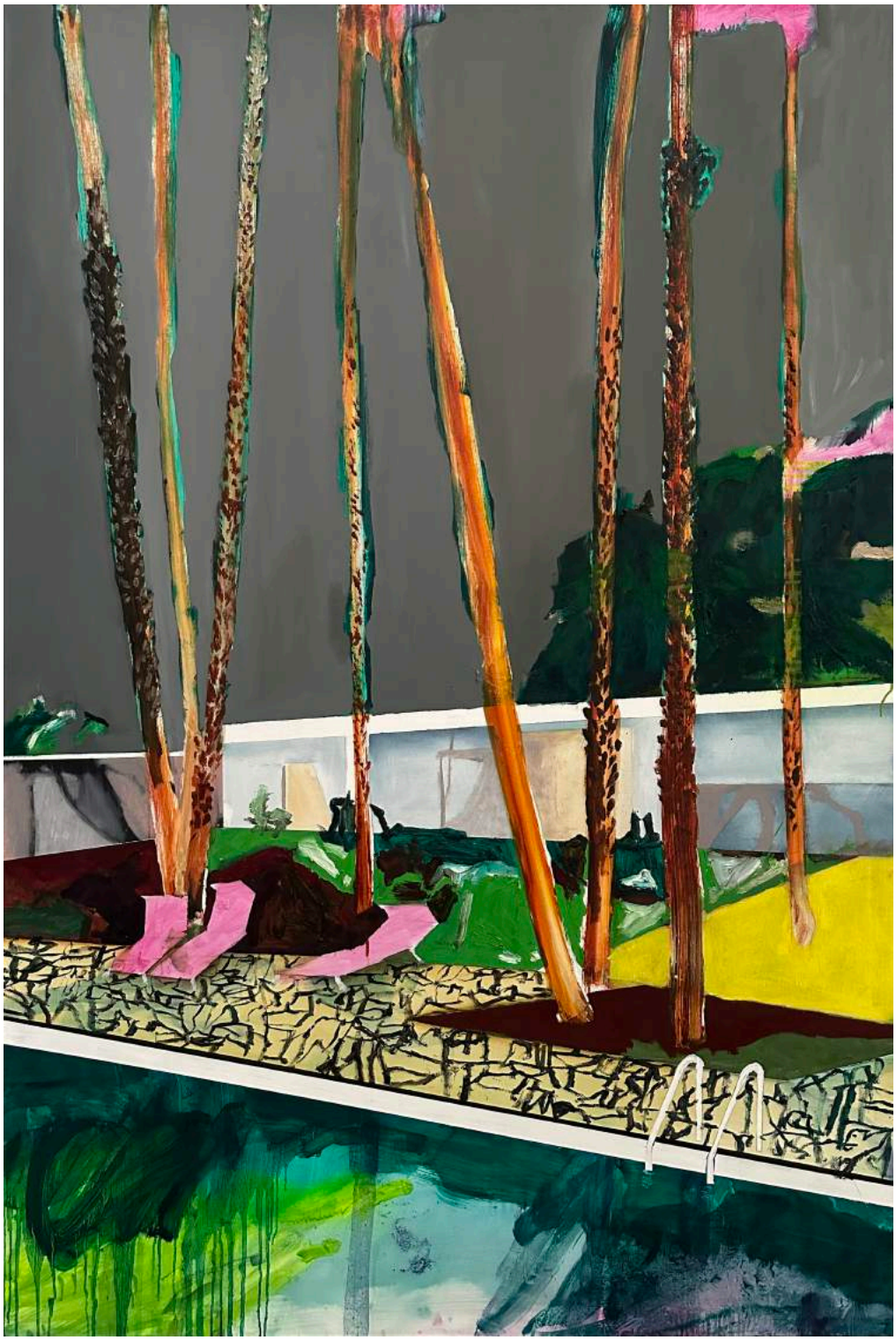


Waldemar KOLBUSZ. *Automatic***.** Oil on linen, 100 x 100CM. A$ 8,500

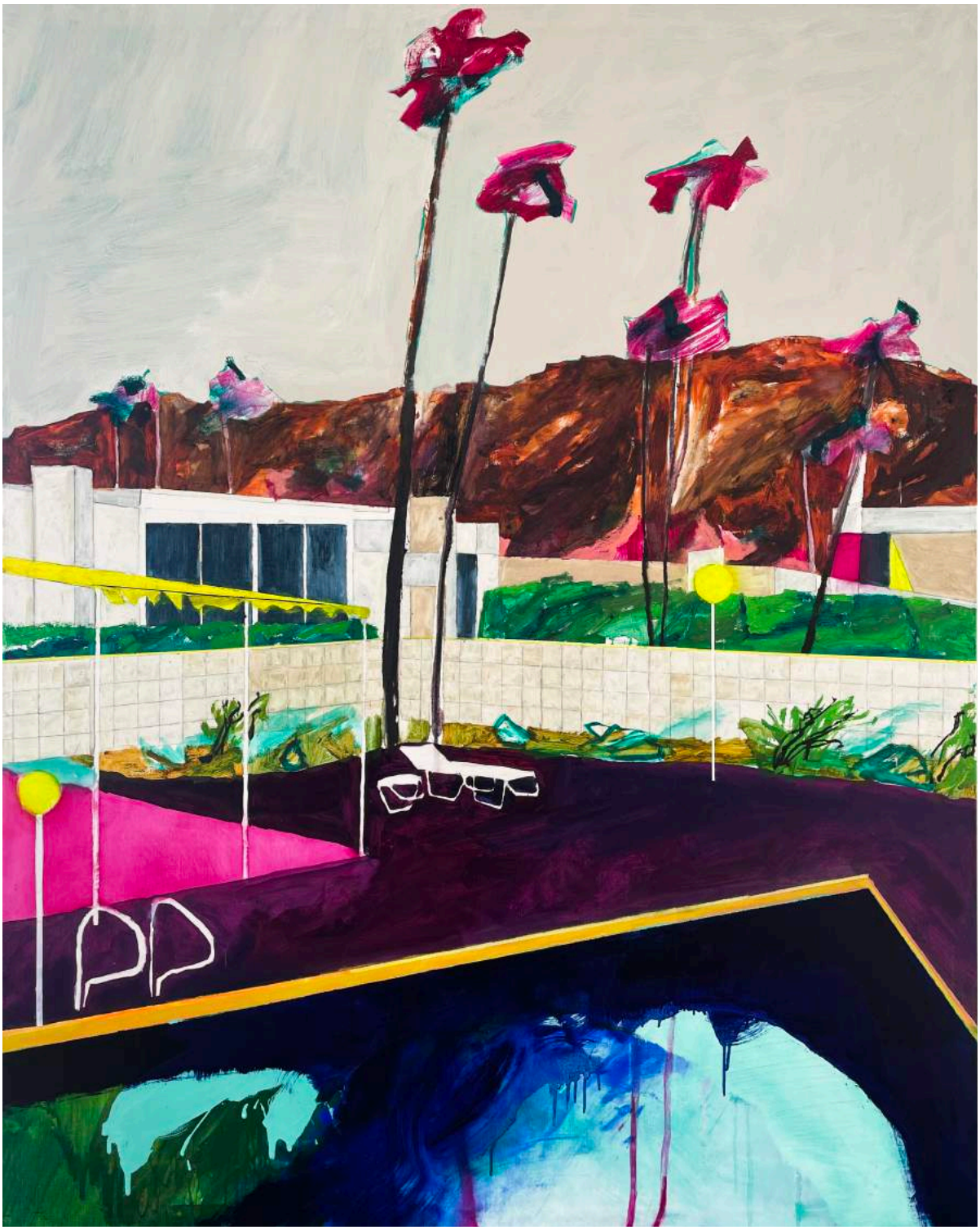


Waldemar KOLBUSZ. *Pool Room.* Oil on linen, 153 x 122CM. A$ 16,000

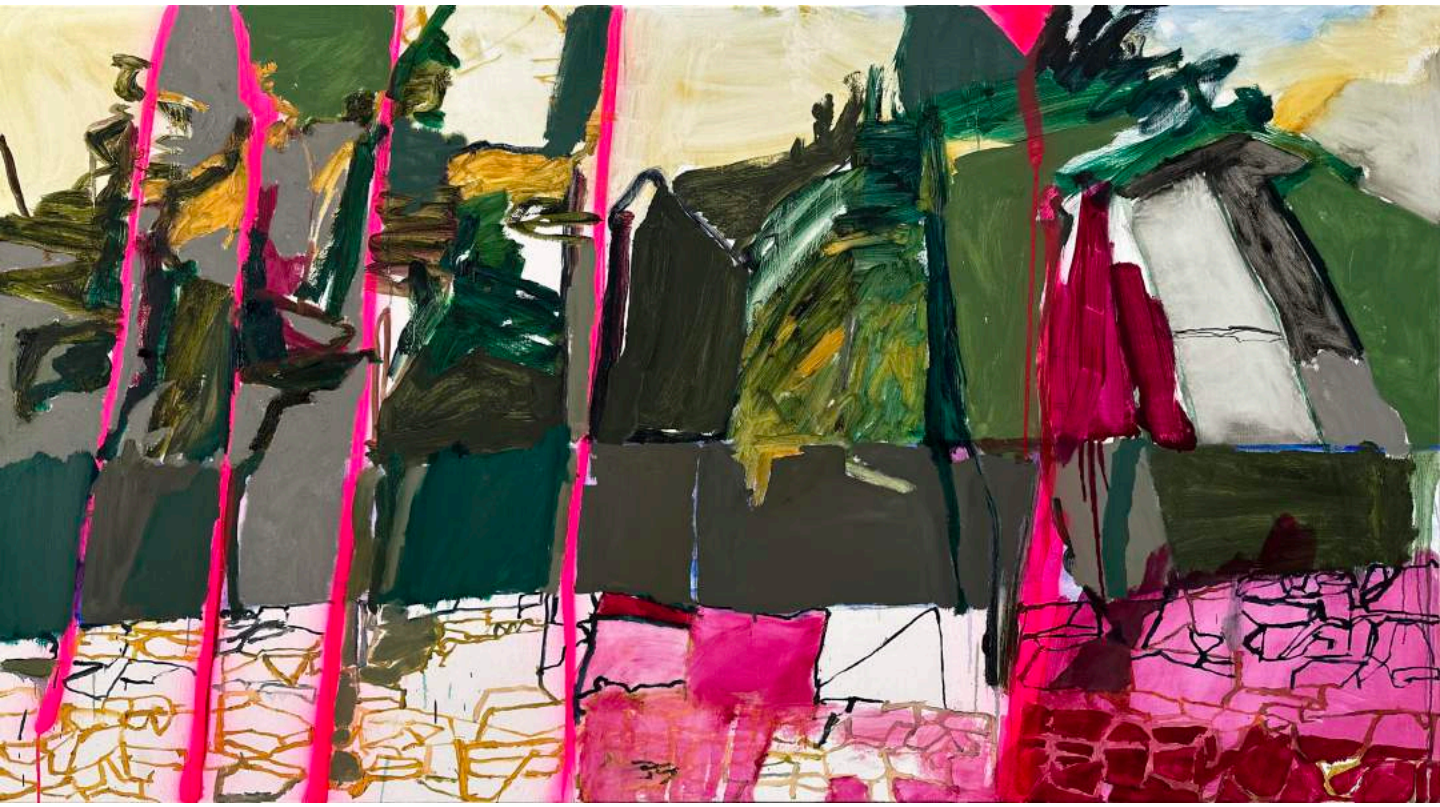
Waldemar KOLBUSZ. *Trip***.** Oil on linen, 122 x 153CM. A$ 16,000



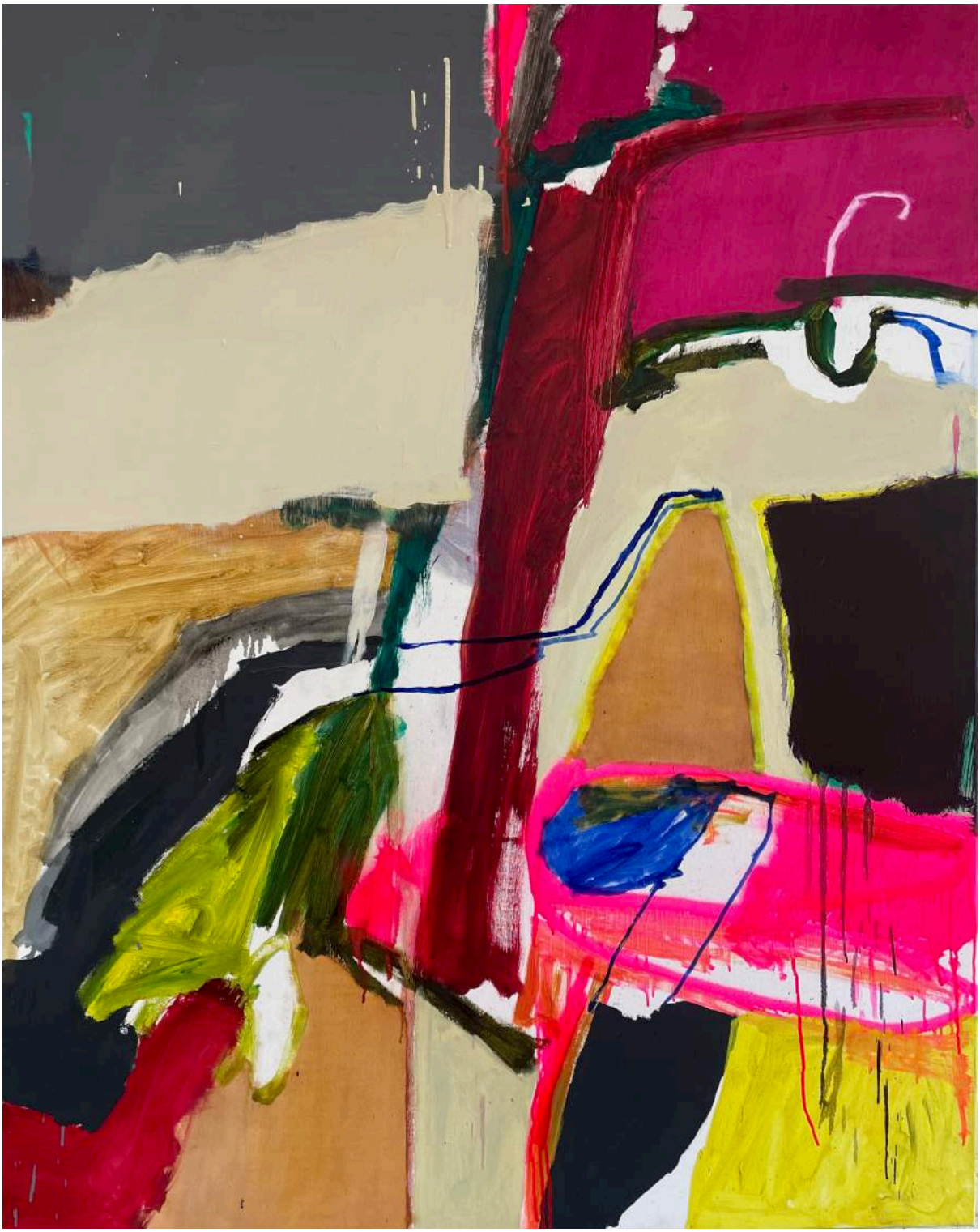
Waldemar KOLBUSZ. *Mirror*. Oil on linen, 183 x 122CM. A$ 18,000



Waldemar KOLBUSZ. *Dive.* Oil on linen, 183 x 122CM. A$ 16,000



Waldemar KOLBUSZ. *Place*. Oil on linen, 101 x 183CM. A$ 16,000



Waldemar KOLBUSZ. *Full*. Oil on linen, 153 x 122CM. A$ 16,000

Waldemar KOLBUSZ. *Idea*. Oil on linen, 50 x 40CM. A$ 2,800

Waldemar Kolbusz – *Diversions*

(by Aimee Dodds, June 2023)

Waldemar Kolbusz's paintings refer *elsewhere*, to themselves, and to their own construction: in their depictions of pre-ordained idyllic faraway locations, rendered with visible brush lines, wavering densities and impetuous drips of paint.

This series of paintings are palpable intermissions simmering with a jostling, charged fragility. Large-scale and saturated, whilst their subjects are of foreign exterior places abroad, somewhere beyond the 129th meridian, their essence is about interior states: something amorphous, something incomprehensible.

The works in *MOTEL* share smoky skies, trees leaning with an uncertain or precarious tilt and deep shadows marring the surface of the canvas like unfading bruises. The places they depict are haunted by spectres: an unfolded umbrella here; chairs angled towards each other but devoid of bodies to occupy them there. These works share an oblique light, always somehow tenebrous despite their high-key colours. Both adroit and disjointed, are they nebulous or structured? Are they examinations of pleasure, pain, or something in between, outside, or containing both?

Watching Kolbusz work is enthralling (he often posts studio time-lapses on his Instagram @waldemarkolbusz)—colours wiped and washed; moved and removed alongside strips of lurid painter's tape. Often spontaneously acting and reacting, as indicated by the excess splashes of colour on the studio wall. Kolbusz paints up high, reaching the canvas above with a physicality that is gestural, loose, and fluid. It's a fraught process, wrestling with both physical and visual tension and attention.

The enveloping size of the works begs our discernment. *Why do they happen, and happen like that*? The 'how' is bold oils and linen, but something in these works is achieved beyond control and conscious choice. Beginning with a sketch of an imported photograph snapped on his travels abroad, Kolbusz soaks these paintings in distance and collapses any ideas of purity, authenticity and detachment. In making, they are contemplated, in viewing, they come on quickly and hit with feverish intensity.

In the titular work, *Motel*, a dozen or so empty pool recliners are dotted beneath impressions of palm trees. This work swerves in and out of figuration into raw brushstrokes—mushes of colour, facture splintering into background. A horrible loveliness besets the smoggy mauve-grey sky, like the atmospheric remnants after a storm or bushfire, something dystopian, something poetic. We approach this place from an impossible viewpoint: strange angles produced by the highlighter-pink lozenge pool void. We are trapped: the vertex of buildings interplaying with the flat angle of the dark water. Its surface is more like a crystal ball, blurring and skewering reflections: a prediction, full of possibility, full of the certainty of death and taxes.

→ *Patterns made by rays of light refracting on water are called* caustics.[i]

Hilariously, the ladder handle of the pool appears so like a plastic straw dipped into a juice cocktail: sip it up, *relax,* you're on holiday after all. The details are delicious: the horizontal smudge of bright orange; the impasto of the Lichtenberg-like detail on the trees in the organic lines of pressed paint; the silvery slivers of branches; the underneath pencil sketch signifying

commencement occasionally poking through. There is an observable liquidity of hand denoted in the thicker scratchings, uses of dry brushing, and the codified texture achieved from scraping back with the wooden end of the brush. Kolbusz often reworks and returns to parts of the composition. The result of this collapse, the handling of layers of colour into semi-transparencies, to borrow from Helen Hughes, is the 'scrambling of both depth and temporality'.[ii] These paintings are at once filmy, sheened, distressed—they demand we fill in the gaps; they deny us that—they stop us in our tracks whilst we remain firmly in place, suspended in a baffled and awestruck conversation between maker and observer.

→ *Purgatory is not a place, but a condition of existence.*[iii]

Up close, the works are impurely speckled with flicks of paint and inclusions of brush hairs, occasioning an achieved and masterful sloppiness. The point is made but not laboured over. There's a beautiful deviation between opacity and translucency, contrasts in the density of paint that both piece the composition together and pull it apart. There is gratification in looking, ever without acquiescence.

"*Create a life you don't have to escape from"* advises an advert on Instagram that once propelled itself onto my phone screen. Is holidaying a forced exile? An indulgent luxury? A capitalist lie? Hotels, motels, getaway routes are diversions. A place where, as Kolbusz says, 'we don't live our real life, we just stay a while.' Here, ideal destinations are reworked into unreal visual journeys.

The literal immersive escapes of swimming pools repeat as subject in many of these works; another observed locus of domestic terror, of human-produced falsity masquerading as naturalistic leisure. In *Trip,* there is a gentleness to the composition, a delicateness to the scrubbed surfaces in the stretches of berry brick, layers of building shapes that converge into abstracts, and trees that flourish into washes. The image starts to slip away: the leaves of the central spiky plant sinking into the shadows and pallid greens of the wall. The foreboding inkiness is matched by patches of stark bleached white, the overall hypnotic coolness of this work all the more unsettling in its discordant harmoniousness. This series reveals something putative or punitive; like why temperature is measured in the shade, why 'feels like' is not always 'is'.

These are not just paintings that make us feel or reflect on serious or frivolous emotions; but works that enact a scepticism regarding the very experience of serious and frivolous emotions in themselves. Feelings are immeasurable. Does painting produce, capture, reflect or nullify them? In Kolbusz's hands, the content leaks between limbo and surety; I am free to choose, I am no longer *content*.

The entirely abstract works like *Full* and *Automatic* have no clear boundaries or architectural delineations but remain firmly interested in atmosphere and shape. They reveal their intentions like a petition—a tactic repeated in *Place*, a work full of organic meanderings patterned like the cracks of old 14th-century varnish. A beach in Croatia is no longer recognisable, instead blocked into warbling lines, propositioned into smudgy impasto and undulating drips. Parts of gold absorb and poke through the sky. Elsewhere, in other works, there are the locatable mountains of Palm Springs, the fir trees of Europe—but their exact realness no longer matters, here they are propelled into something else.

Imagine when, for the very first time (sometime during the 1400s), Giotto painted the sky in blue pigment instead of gold as was then customary, and as his teacher Cimabue and dozens of other Byzantine painters had before him. Gold sky for heaven, blue sky for earth. Dante would praise Giotto in the *Purgatorio* then condemn painters in general for their pridefulness.[iv] To

wrestle with the profound, to try to understand heightened states, to seek out ultra-experiences that reposition our own existences may indeed be prideful—but to acknowledge their fallibility, as Kolbusz does, as Giotto did, in fact seems humble.

Forgetting momentarily, that pushing around coloured pigment and oiled goop onto canvas with a brush made of animal or synthetic hair is its own kind of strangeness[v]—imagine how dazzlingly weird the first painted blue sky would have read to viewers, even more strange because of its inherent familiarity. *Nothing gold can stay* said Robert Frost.[vi] But here, in Kolbusz's hands, for a suspended moment, again the sky is gold, the pool is pink.

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[i] Thanks to Max Vickery who pointed this wonderful definition out in the course of writing.

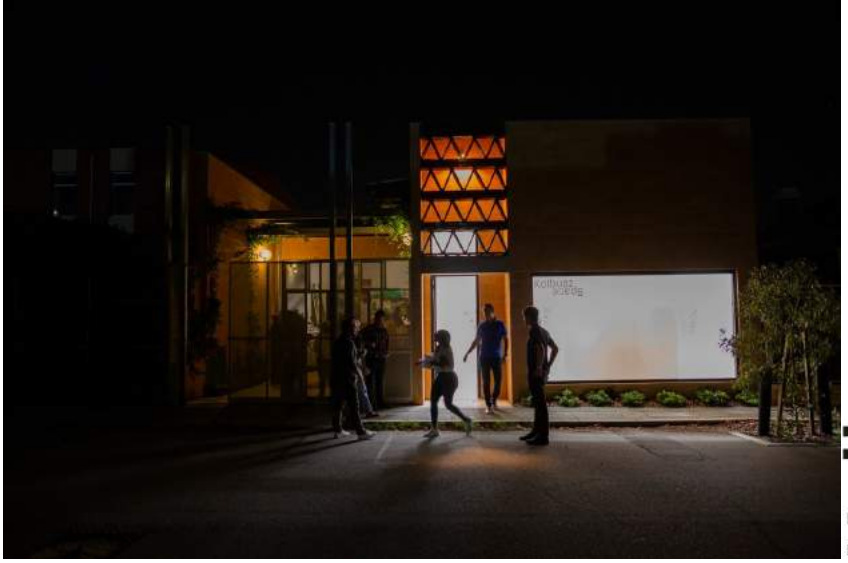
[ii] Helen Hughes, writing on Vivienne Binns' 2018 exhibition *It is what it is, what it is*, as published in *Memo Review.* https://memoreview.net/reviews/it-is-what-it-is-what-it-is-vivienne-binns-at-sutton-gallery-by-helen-hughes

[iii] So sayeth the Vatican on 'Purgatory' in 1999, in an address given by Pope John Paul II. Recorded at https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/audiences/1999/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_04081999.html

[iv] *Purgatory* 11.93-95. Dante describes the painter Giotto di Bondone (c.1267-1337) as surpassing in greatness the artist Cimabue (c.1240-1302), considered by Dante to be the first painter of his time: "In painting Cimabue thought he held/the field, and now it's Giotto they acclaim-/the former only keeps a shadowed fame". Ironic too, that Dante was an artist putting his own version of greatness to paper, now revered among the best.

[v] Also seen on Instagram from @artreviewpower100: "The beauty terror and possibility in this world paralyze [sic] me most days but smearing this colorful [sic] gloop onto fabric with tiny animal hairs is the only thing that has ever made any sense to me". Meme posted 10 July 2021. https://www.instagram.com/artreviewpower100/

[vi] Robert Frost, 'Nothing gold can stay', which reads as follows: "Nature's first green is gold/Her hardest hue to hold./Her early leaf's a flower;/But only so an hour./Then leaf subsides to leaf. /So Eden sank to grief,/So dawn goes down to day. /Nothing gold can stay." Published 1923 in the collection *New Hampshire*.



Kolbusz Space

OPENING DRINKS Fri 14 July: 6-8PM
VIEW Sat 15 July and Sun 16 July: 10-4PM

Contact for previews by appt and pre-sales hello@kolbuszspace.com
2 Gladstone Street, PERTH 6000

Portrait by Jody D'Arcy.

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