



Ariele Moulton-Barrett

Her Vision Unveiled

Cover: *Self-Portrait*

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essay by
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Self-Portraits

Although most of us are multi-dimensional, few have the inclination to explore facets of their own personalities or the technique to express their findings. Ariele Moulton-Barrett was an exception. She belonged to that small coterie who, by virtue of natural gifts, hard work and excellent training, bequeathed to us a substantial number of artworks that tell us more about herself than could dozens of photographs. Because of their intimate involvement with her persona, her self-portraits in particular stand apart.

Just as Rembrandt and Van Gogh had done, Ariele mined the treasures of the face, especially her own. She saw herself with the untrammelled confidence of spring (Fig. 1), or brooding, as of winter (Fig. 2). These contrasting images, both frontal views, are not manipulated by a restless drive to explore, as are some of the following self-portraits.

In Fig. 3 she delves into the feelings that lie behind the forms; in Fig. 4 she hides the lower part of her face, using a Job-like gesture that says, "No more questioning." Her head in profile (Fig. 5), curiously confined to a corner, faces a field of agitated, white abstract lines. In some of the self-portraits, slashing strokes, independent of the structure of the face, assert themselves (Fig. 6). These are not stylish modernisms: Perhaps they suggest psychic scars.

Fig. 7 and 8 were done shortly before her untimely death. She drew a rough copy of Michelangelo's *Pieta* and then transmogrified it into a dark forest of lines. In what seems to be a prophetic and personal requiem, she casts herself as the suffering being.



Fig. 1, *Self-Portrait*, charcoal



Fig. 2, *Self-Portrait*, charcoal

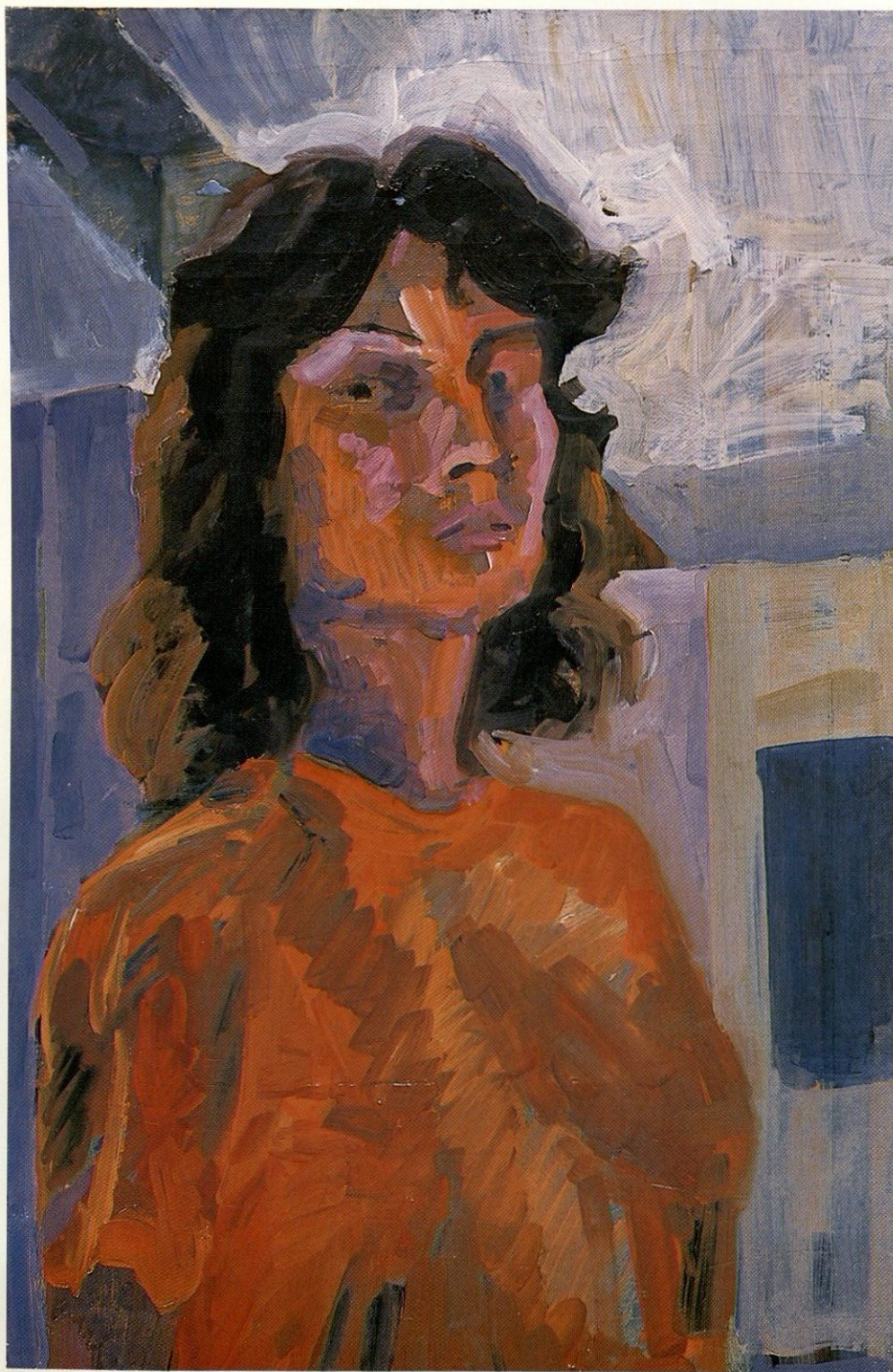


Fig. 3, *Self-Portrait, Orange Shirt*, oil

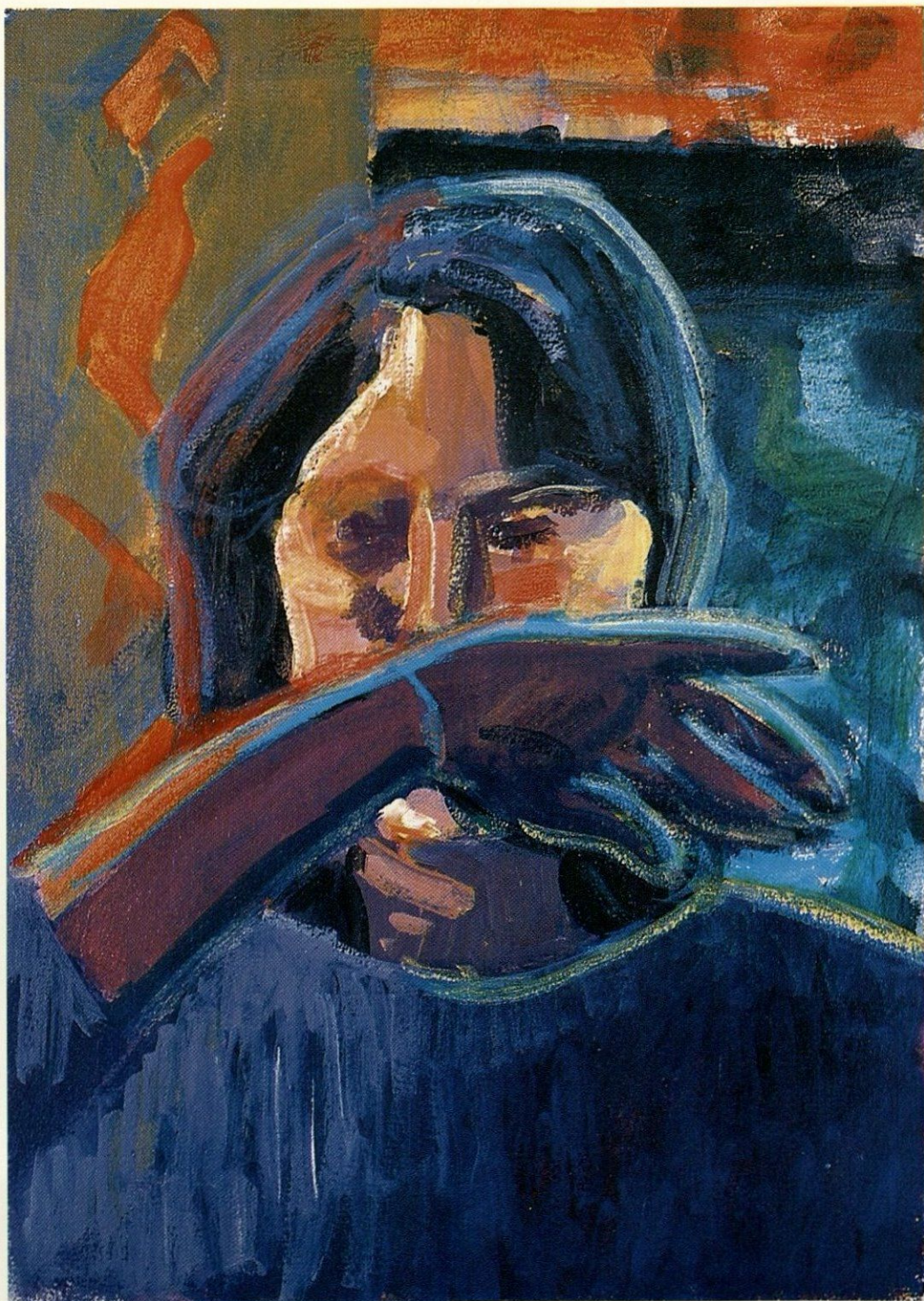


Fig. 4, *Self-Portrait*, oil



Fig. 5, *Self-Portrait*, charcoal

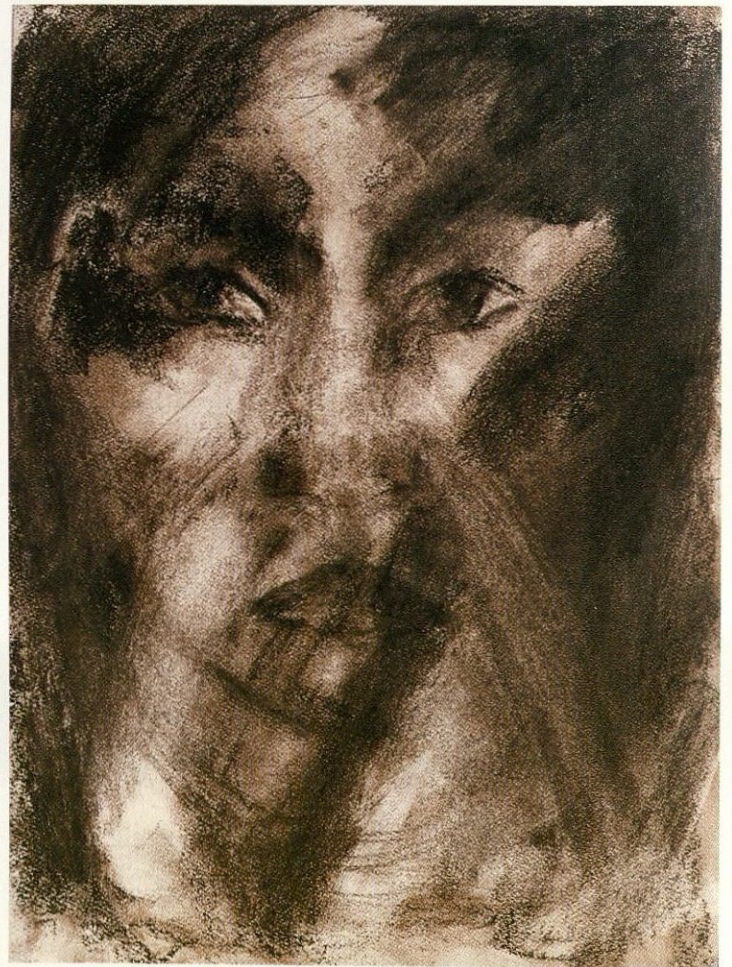


Fig. 6, *Self-Portrait*, brown charcoal



Fig. 7, Drawing after Michelangelo's *Pieta*, pen

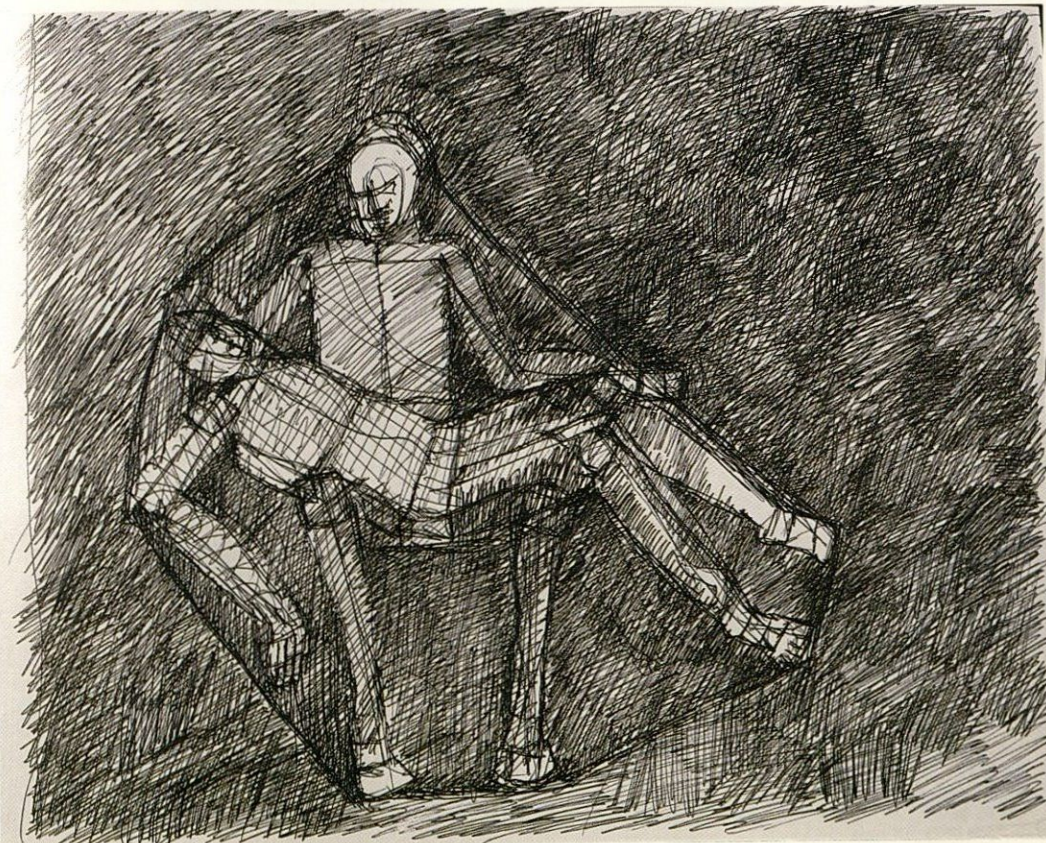


Fig. 8, Drawing after Michelangelo's *Pieta*, pen

The World Nearby

In Arièle's world of places and things there is no *Sturm und Drang*. Instead, her inner tensions yield to the world of objects that have engaged artists for many centuries: potted plants; teapots and cups; fruits waiting to be served; bakery ready for the spreading knife; intimate spaces of a studio (Figs. 9-12). Everything simply exists, waiting for human intervention — for something to happen. These paintings, like propositions for exploring both the repertory of color and the calculus of shapes, bristle with potential energy. As backdrops to everyday life, they present themselves with unabashed pride. They play this role because the artist has endowed them with her own pictorial eroticism.

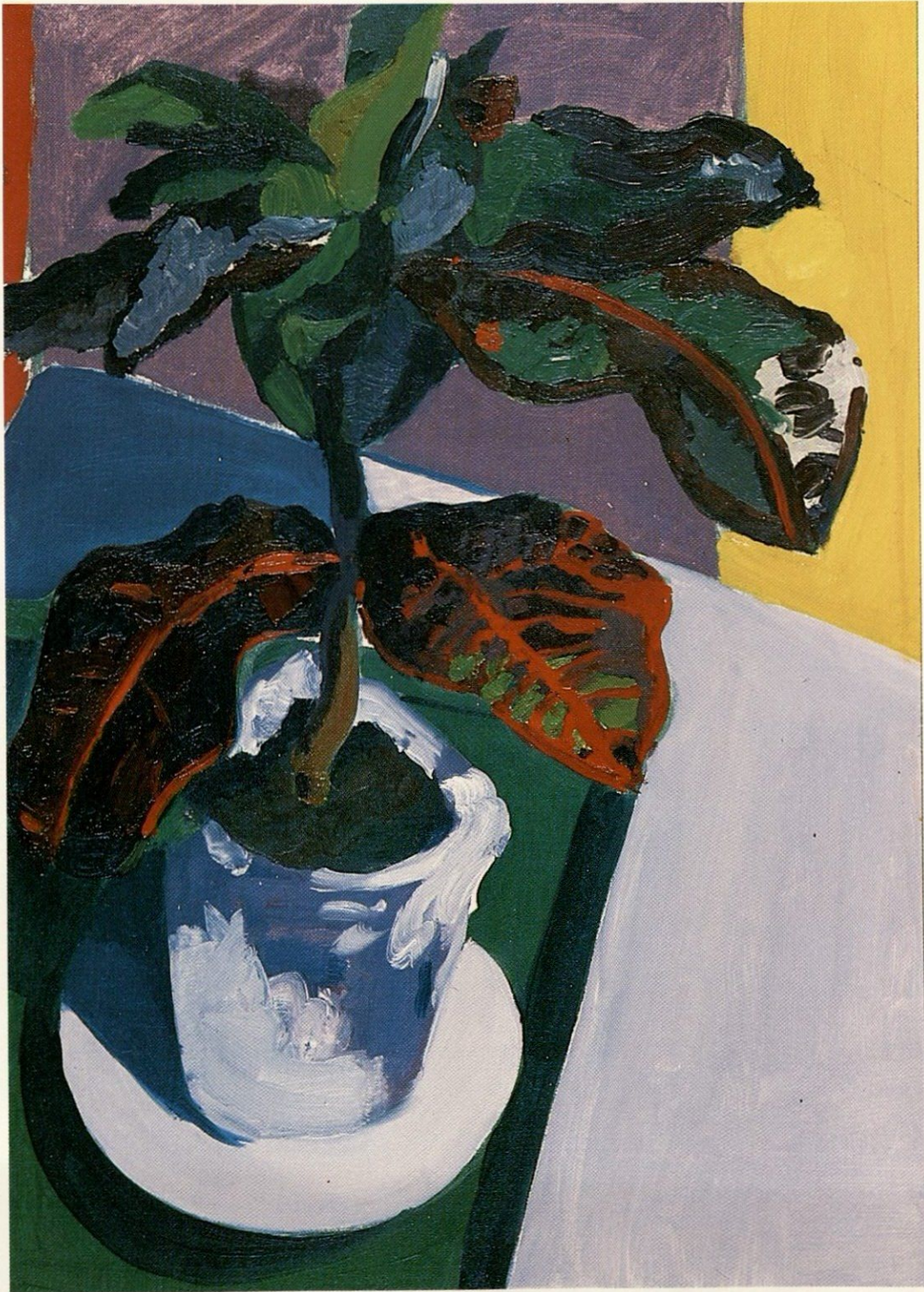


Fig. 9, *Plant in a Pot*, oil



Fig. 10, *Picnic Scene*, oil

Collection of Rex E. Moulton-Barrett, MD, California

The World Out There

Using color to make the world out there look like the world in your hands



Fig. 11, *Still Life*, watercolor



Fig. 12, *New York Studio School*, oil

The World Out There

When Ariele turned her attention to the outdoors, she wasn't attracted to cityscapes, views of people working or playing, the drama of the changing seasons or the complexion of furious storms. She looked upon the outside scenes as she did her own interiors, as objects of visual desire.

On the Way to Sayre, Pa. (Fig. 13), represents a certain place at a certain time. In order to capture the specifics of the scene, Ariele has kept in harness the magic that the watercolor brushwork can conjure up. In **Binghamton Landscape** (Fig. 14), her use of broad strokes and intense oil colors creates an almost expressionistic scene. There's a Monet influence in **Reflections in the Water** (Fig. 15), but with an overlay of abstract patterns in the foliage. In **Window on South Beach, Fla.** (Fig. 16), nature's vibrancy becomes an icon of longing for the housebound. **Pathway in the Woods** (Fig. 17), shows a boldly colored pathway and the complex vigor of things growing wild. This more intimate treatment of nature engulfs the viewer by bringing nature up close.

With **Van Gogh's Poplars** (Fig. 18), Ariele pays homage to her favorite artist. We immediately recognize her allegiance to the Dutch master, but then, just as quickly, we notice the audacious recoloring she has ventured, if not risked. In the intensity of her impulse for painterly expression, she resembles her hero.



Fig. 13, *On the Way to Sayre, Pa.*, watercolor



Fig. 14, *Binghamton Landscape*, oil



Fig. 15, *Reflections in the Water*, after Monet, oil



Fig. 16, *Window on South Beach, Fla.*, oil

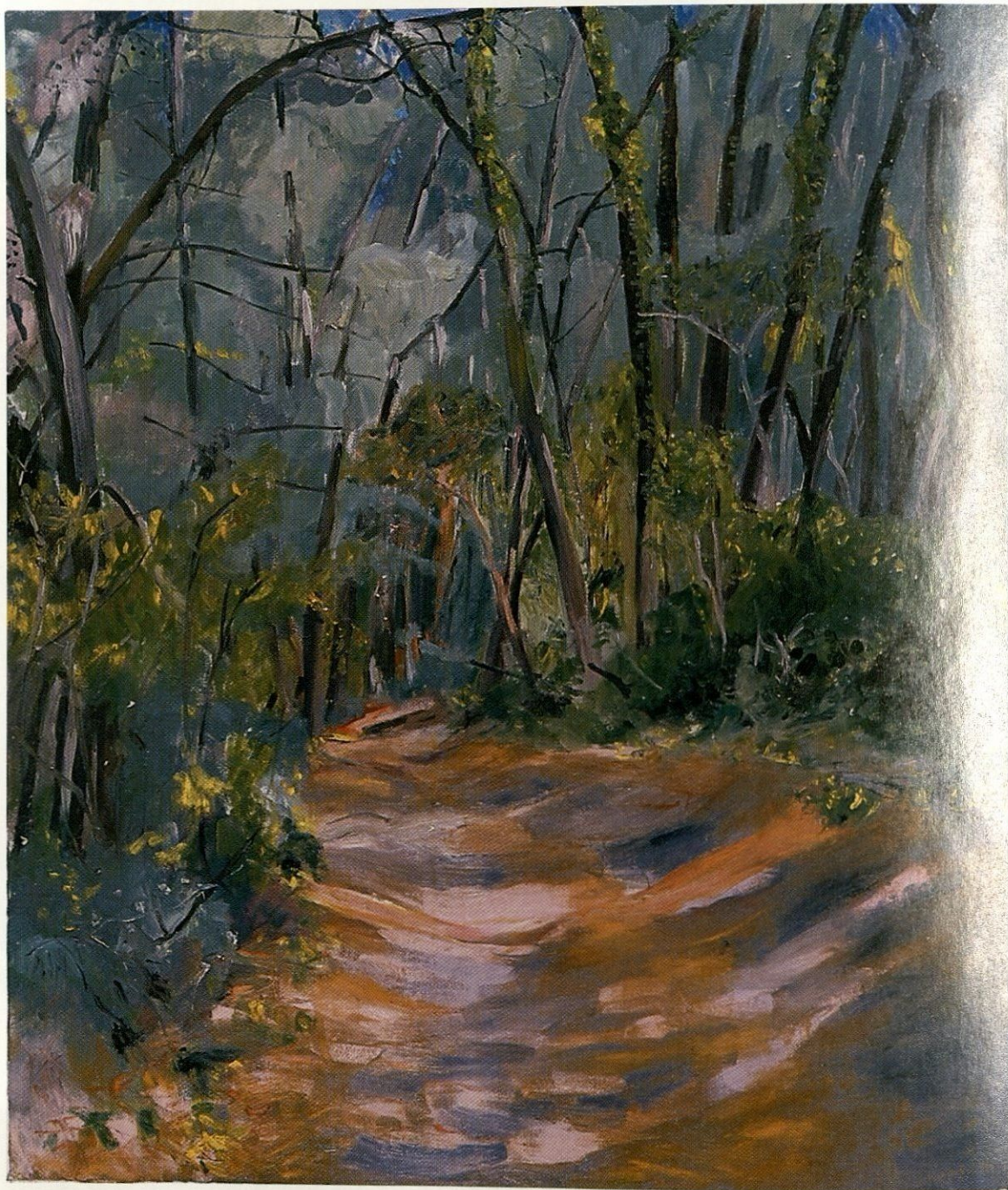


Fig. 17, *Pathway in the Woods*, oil

Collection of Tom Murphy, Binghamton, New York



Fig. 18, *Van Gogh's Poplars*, oil

Drawings and Nudes

Ariele left behind more than 2,000 artworks. No one, not even her mother or teachers, had knowledge of more than a small part of this enormous output. Ariele kept most of them to herself, which reflects one of the ways she built barriers around her inner thoughts and feelings, especially during the last years of her life.

She drew incessantly. Trial-and-error efforts were carefully saved, possibly to serve as future references or as mementos of problems solved. She worked equally well in both charcoal (Fig. 19) and the often brisk tempo of pen and ink (Fig. 20). When the subject demanded it, she shifted medium, a change that frequently stimulated her inventiveness. Good draftsmanship gives substance to figure painting. It provided *pondération* to the standing body, as in **Man's Back** (Fig. 21); it helped project a mood, such as exhaustion in **Reclining Figure** (Fig. 22); it aided the sense of alert anticipation in **Reclining Nude** (Fig. 24). In the latter, the raised right arm semaphores readiness, while the supporting arm in **Nude Female** (Fig. 23) teases us with its plethora of possible signals. **Nude Female** appears incomprehensible when reproduced in black-and-white (as do many other works in this exhibition catalog), proving the seminal role that color played in her pictorial thinking.

These nudes with blank faces show that Ariele can tip the balance between body and spirit: While capturing the animal-like attitude of human figures, she excises thought and mood by obliterating the features.



Fig. 19, *My Hand*, charcoal



Fig. 20, untitled drawing, ink



Fig. 21, *Man's Back*, charcoal



Fig. 22, *Reclining Figure*, charcoal

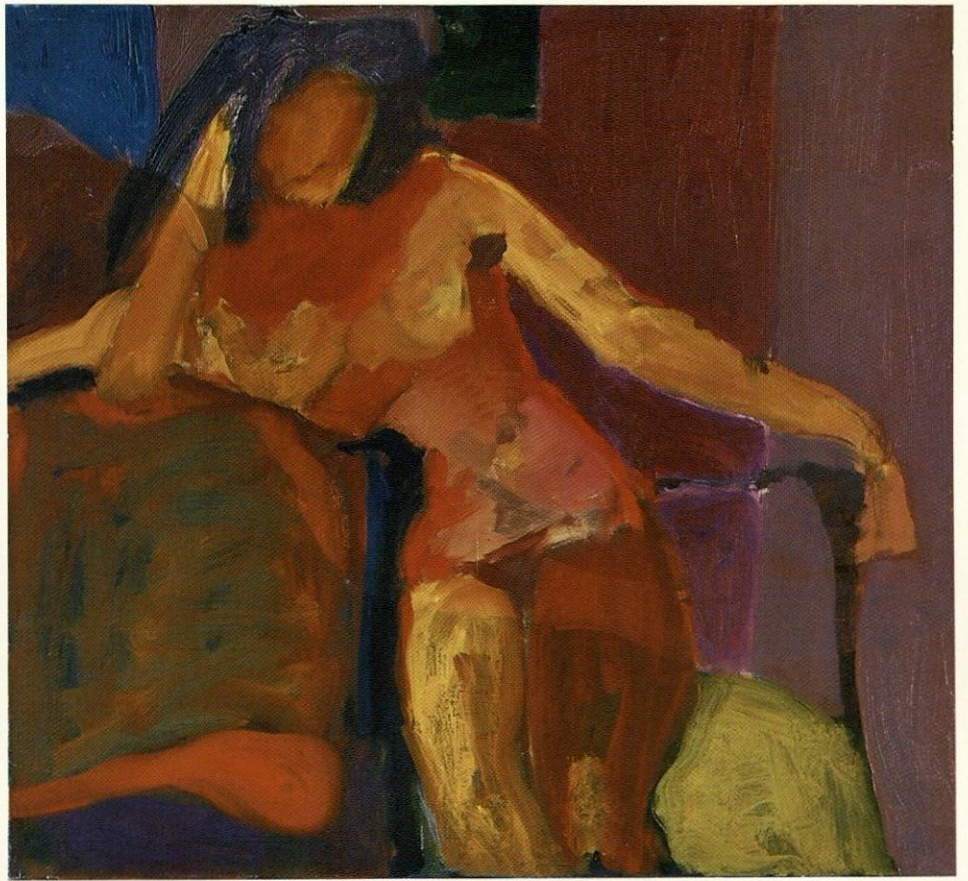


Fig. 23, *Nude Female*, oil

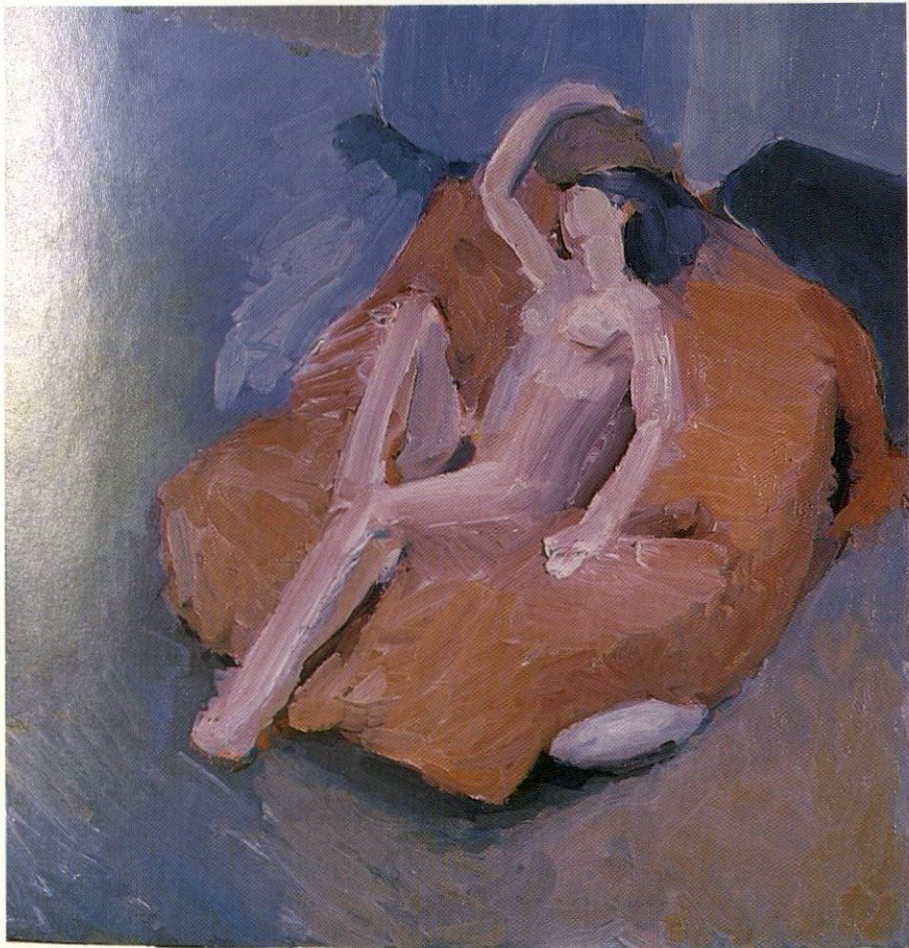


Fig. 24, *Reclining Nude*, oil

Apparitions

The artist did not give a name to this set of watercolors: After making them, she simply put them aside and went on to other subjects and media. Yet these watercolors have a uniqueness that distinguishes them from her other works. In each, Ariele uses the human figure, alone and in frontal view, to probe the depths of female being.

The series begins with a woman opening her watercolor box (Fig. 25). A fog of hues supplants logical lighting and specific setting. Two nude females (Figs. 26 and 27) — one of them on the floor, resting, the other on a chair, waiting — hardly prepare us for the **Figure in Blue** (Fig. 28). This pathetic creature — ravaged beyond anything Samuel Beckett could have described — floats in vapors, tips its head as if in pain or in resignation, or as if questioning.

These watercolors were made in 1985. The final sheet (Fig. 29) came later and was prepared for by many pencil studies, suggesting that the artist may have been wrestling with a large-scale topic of concern. In this work, darkness subdues both the right background and the right arm; the arms are tightly bound to the body; the feminine delta is unencumbered; and the head is raised in a primal scream — a cousin to the cry made by Edvard Munch's ambiguous figure on that deranged Norwegian bridge.

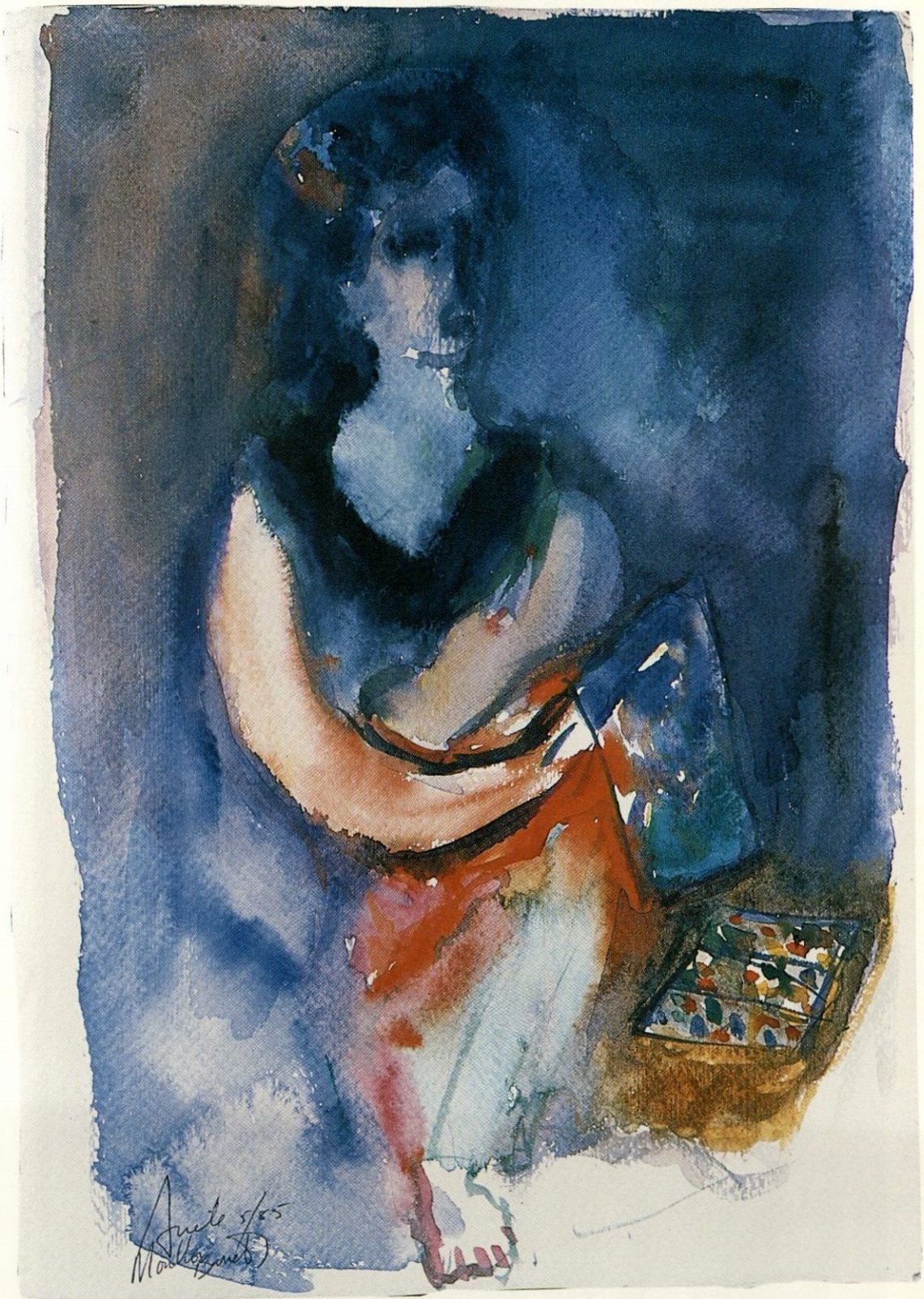


Fig. 25, *Female Figure with Palette*, watercolor



Fig. 26, *Seated Female Figure*, watercolor



Fig. 28, *Figure, Blue and Green Background*, watercolor

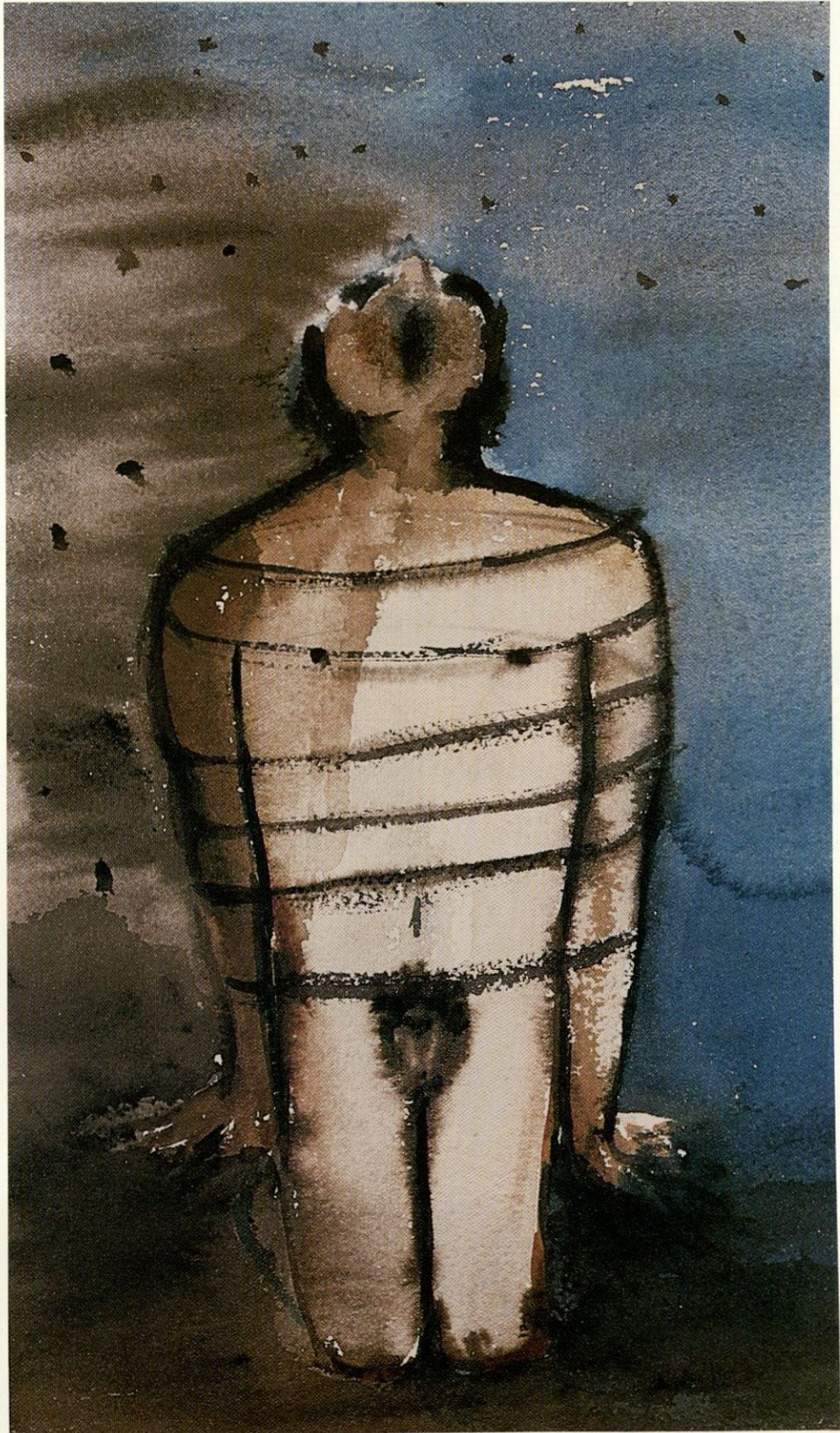


Fig. 29, *Bound Figure*, watercolor

May Day and Mayday

At the beginning of this exhibition catalog we saw two charcoal self-portraits. Twenty-seven works later, two watercolors complete the series. These final works serve both as a conclusion and as a revelation of the artist's remarkable scope.

The colors of Fig. 30 are bright and fresh, thrusting upward with the exuberance of a fine May day. In them we feel the spirit of new beginnings. In contrast, the brush strokes of Fig. 31, vagrant and even hostile, lash at what appears to be the remnants of a head — of a person suffering from the perplexity of being and the terror of no exit, of one who cries out, "Mayday."

The unveiling of this present exhibition reveals a rich legacy, one filled with great promise. It also establishes the coordinates between which the artist's imagination swung back and forth, like a pendulum, from a *joie de vivre* to a *cri du coeur*.

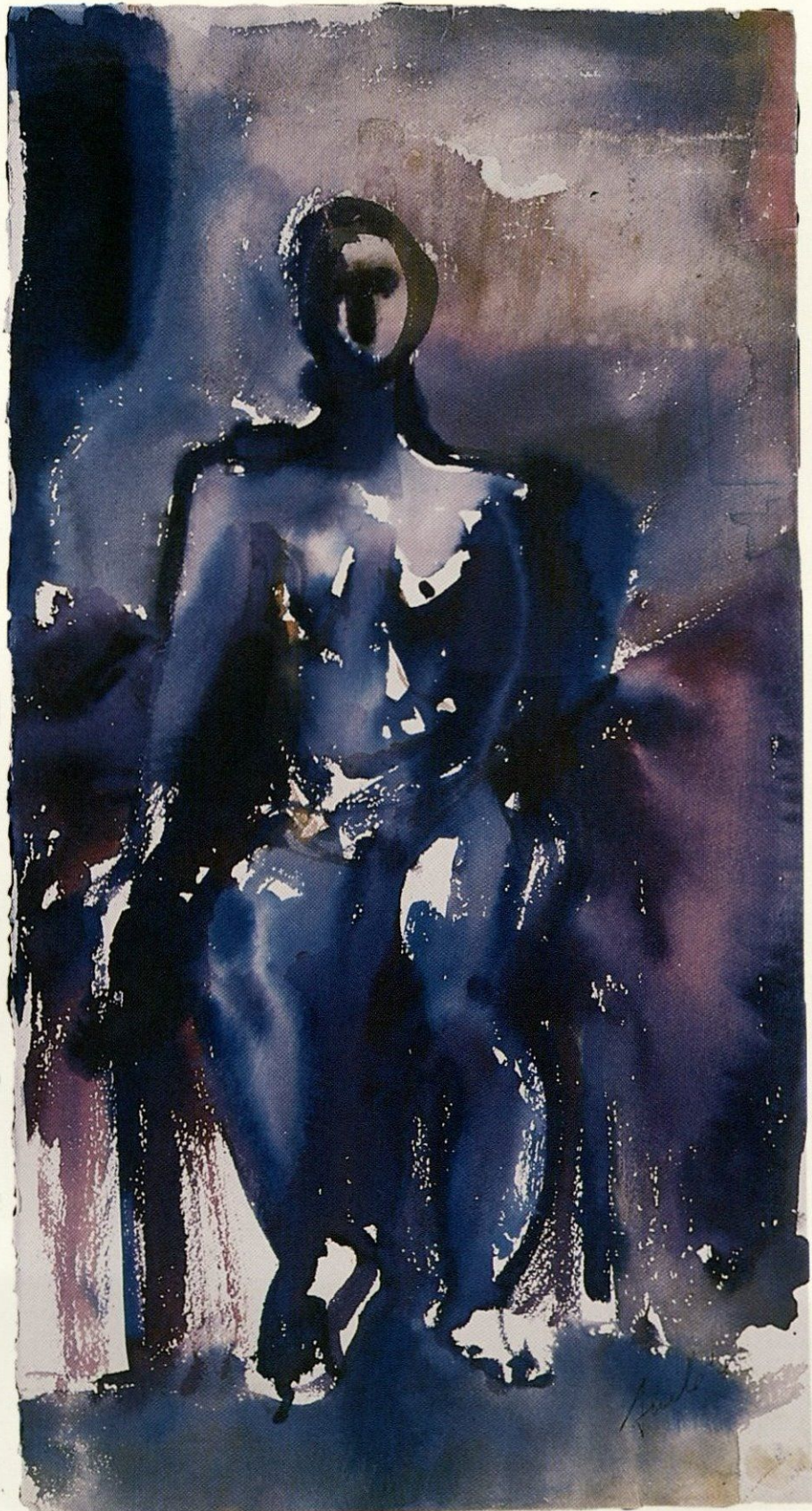


Fig. 27, *Figure in Blue and Purple*, watercolor



Fig. 30, *May Day*, watercolor



Fig. 31, *Mayday*, watercolor

Biographical Sketch

By Maria Moulton-Barrett

Ariele Elizabeth Moulton-Barrett (April 11, 1955-October 4, 2000) was the daughter of Capt. Gordon and Dr. Maria Moulton-Barrett. She was the great-great-grandniece of poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the granddaughter of Emmanuel Limkowski, jeweler, of Antwerp and Ostend, Belgium.

Born in Manhattan, she spent most of her childhood and adolescence in Binghamton and attended elementary and high school there. She also attended the girls' school Linden Hall, in Lititz, Pa., followed by the Headington School in Oxfordshire, where she completed pre-university studies. She obtained a bachelor of arts in studio art at Binghamton University (1979), having spent her third year of college at the Royal College of Art in Antwerp. Her graduate studies took her to Florida International University, where she received a teacher's certificate in 1984, and then to the New York Studio School (1987-90).

She had a successful one-woman show at the Circle Gallery in New York City (1985); a Swedish art dealer bought most of her work. In 1990, she won a fellowship from the New York Studio School to the Chautauqua Summer Art Workshop in upstate New York. She also had a one-woman show at the Jewish Community Center of Binghamton in 1992.

Ariele's employment record was varied. She was a gourmet chef, inspected electronic circuit boards, became a freelance proofreader and editor, and did secretarial work, substitute teaching and full-time teaching. However, she spoke little of the work she was truly proud of: as an employee of the City of Miami, Fla., she helped with the reception and resettlement of the large influx of Cuban refugees there. Her younger brother Rex E. experienced what he described as "her unerring mission in life to help the downtrodden." He recalled her teaching art classes in the Overtown section of Miami, where her fourth-grade students rewarded her with their fine work and their love.

During the last years of her life, which were often disquieting and painful, she still brought into existence a great body of artwork, a sampling of which is shown here. She drew and sketched hundreds of people, taking great care with some so as not to invade their private world of suffering. To the last, in her own world, she continued to paint and to experiment with newer forms. Her artwork kept her alive. She clung to it for as long as she could.

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