



Choy Chun Wei

Encountering
Mass Man

Catalog 2

Wei-LingGallery

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Choy Chun Wei

Encountering Mass Man

2 March - 10 April 2021

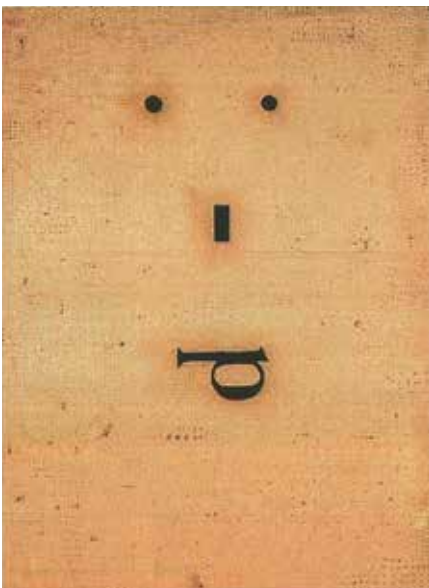
Encountering Mass Man

Isolated, disconnected, fragmented—these are recurring themes that have encompassed our lives over the last year; sentiments which are encapsulated and expressed through Choy Chun Wei's new series and solo exhibition, *Encountering Mass Man*, proudly presented by Wei-Ling Gallery. As an artist widely-acclaimed for his multi-layered collage work—one that draws constant inspiration from his environment and how he witnesses the evolution of society—the way the pandemic has shifted our way of being, thinking, and connecting, spurred him to create this monumental oeuvre.

Chun Wei was born and raised in Sungai Petani, a small town, in the state of Kedah, located in the northwest of Malaysia. At the age of 13, his family moved to Petaling Jaya, a greater area of Kuala Lumpur. This Feeling of dislocation—of moving from the peaceful rural life he grew up in, to the unending noise and the 'coldness' of the urban setting, never left Chun Wei. He has continuously sought for a medium to investigate the unsettling emotions that he felt, as he experienced the drastic change between these two environments. Finding clarity in the act of arranging different forms, colours, words, numbers, formats and textures into vast-ranging compositions, it has always been through the technique of collage that Chun Wei channels his concerns and observations.

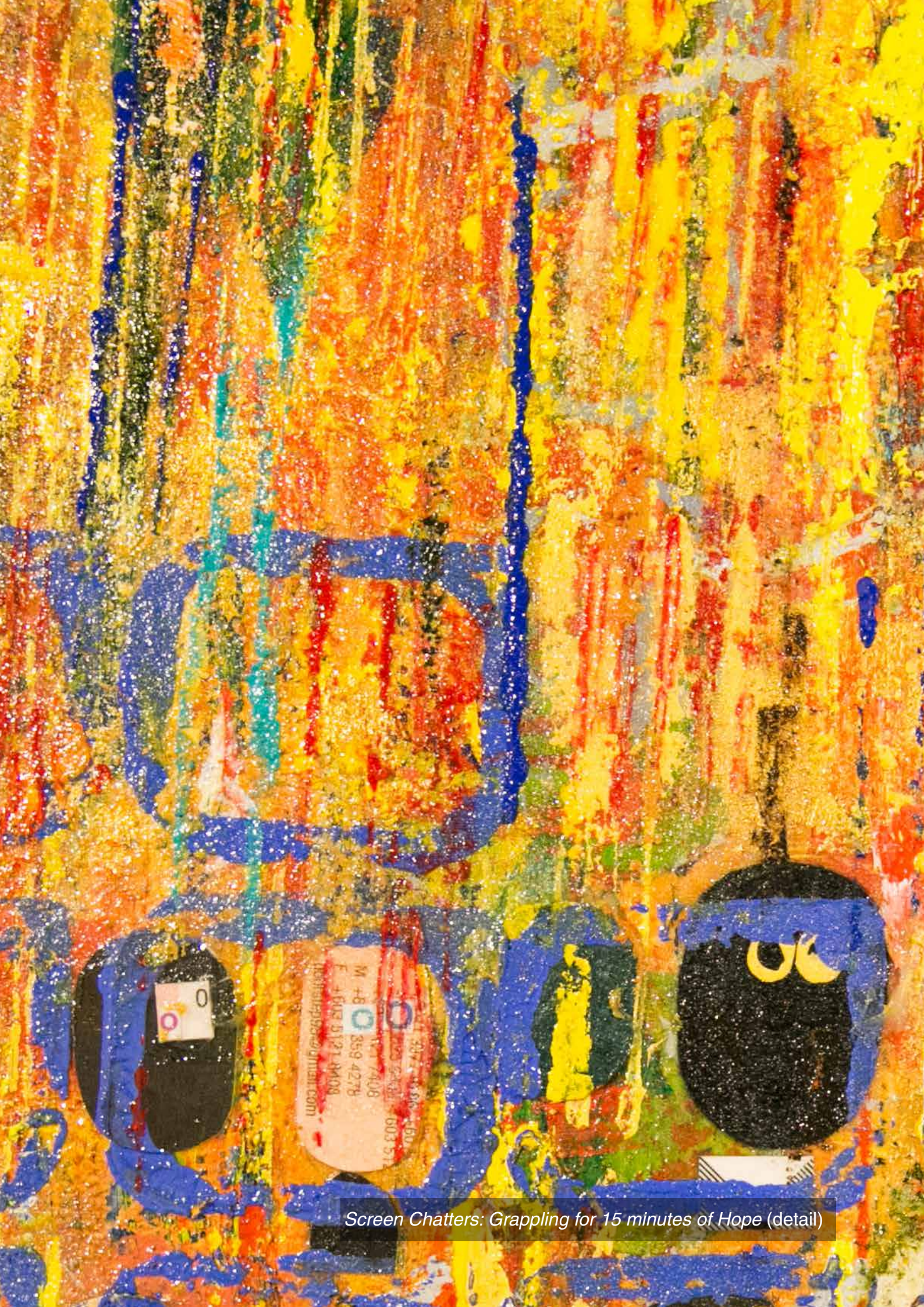
Geometrical elements that depict facades of the suburban, as well as magazine headlines that resonate with our consumer-driven society, are ever-present in his past series. However, it was only through his last body of work, *Tectonic Traces* (2017), that Chun Wei began introducing hints of painted human figures. Framed inside rectangular outlines, these faceless portraits which bear no facial expressions, are representations of individuals being trapped and consumed inside their mobile or computer screens, of the virtual world.

Thus, as Chun Wei's work grew more complex and mature over the years, his observations of the human condition allowed him to become more attuned to the understanding of human behaviour. Through *Encountering Mass Man*, the artist began recognizing the sentimental aspects of being under lockdown, especially with our heavy use of technology as a way of coping with the strange conditions—be it for working, connecting with people, or as a form of entertainment. This time, the portraits are completed with typed symbols that represent facial features such as the eyes, nose and the mouth. Interestingly, the visual inspiration behind these portraits is his own early work, *Self-Portrait* (1999), whereby the artist painted a textual portrait of himself, consisting merely of two dots, a dash and a letter 'p'. A once popular texting style known as 'emoticon', years before the smartphone and 'emoji' became a worldwide phenomenon.



Self-Portrait
Graphite charcoal and ink pen on unprimed canvas
130cm x 97cm
1999

Chun Wei believes that abstraction has the power of conveying emotions. And, as he described, *“It isn't just about the advancement of the technology itself anymore, rather the feelings of uncertainty, anxiety and breaking down that it results in. There is a certain fragility that comes out of it.”* However, he continued, *“There is also a feeling of nostalgia, and a sense of happiness from communicating and regrouping with others.”* Like a blessing in disguise, this pandemic has also allowed him to cherish certain memories, and re-establish meaningful connections. This hopeful way of looking at the situation is also expressed through a vibrant palette of blue, turquoise, red, and yellow, as well as dynamic textures, combining smooth and robust surfaces. Although most of the time the artist would place himself as an observer, as he himself summed it up with these words: *“This series feels more personal than ever.”*



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Screen Chatters: Grappling for 15 minutes of Hope (detail)

Encountering Mass Man (2021)

Choy Chun Wei

We may think we know Choy Chun Wei's works — feel that with his use of printed materials from our consumer era that we understand them — and take pride in our ability to access his hybrid world that is based on the fourfold schema of artist and object, the media and mind. As *Encountering Mass Man* demonstrates, there is much more to the title than meets the eye. The suite of eight vibrantly coloured works mounted onto the wall will ensnare you, as do the far from innocent fragments of slick advertising prints which transport you into a discomfiting world, a place of captivation where optically, nothing is quite what it first seems to be. As Choy elucidates the exhibition title, "As delightful as it is that we are connected to one another through virtual communication in this lockdown, our meetings are nevertheless still projections. There is a longing for tangible relationships in the resistance and boundaries, how that is important to us." *Encountering Mass Man* suggests a paradox and expresses a balancing act that nudges us to search ourselves in a turbulent, liquid environment.

Choy's compositions of abstracted fields are placed across the room like storyboards, prompting us to move between and around them as we attempt to build our own narratives. One could first view the paintings from a distance, taking in the dramatic sweep of colours and the corresponding relationship the pieces have with one another. Then, later entering into the space and moving through it, experiencing a shuffling sequence of colours which results in stopping to scrutinise the texture of Choy's mark-making on the canvas, or ponder on why he has decided to include more ellipses than his distinctive quadrilaterals. While the artist's works since 2001 have explicitly invited us to be critical of commodification in the rapid pace of urbanism, this series extends beyond that discourse with delicate nuances which mark a significant progression in his artistic career. Speaking with Choy about the ellipses he explained, "I've always been fascinated by them visually. What I find interesting is that these rounded shapes echo our ears and kidneys, thumb and

head. The forms seem to almost mirror one another through their oval shapes; it is symbolic in that it reflects more on being human and how the current condition has affected me, the world, our movement throughout.”

As more existing technologies are stacked onto each other, leading to a dependency on online connectivity, it has been easy to believe that our freedom of expression and self are best played out on technological platforms. There is an intoxicating feeling of gratification that goes hand in hand with instant response, yet there exists a sharp increase in anxiety and uncertainty when portraying ourselves to the world beyond our screen windows. To quote philosopher Martin Heidegger in his magnum opus *‘Being and Time’* (1927), ‘Everyone is the other and no one is himself.’¹ Heidegger’s understanding of our being is pertinent to *Encountering Mass Man*.

‘Grappling’ (2020-21) offers us an insight into the paradox graphically: abstract portraits of ovals, some completed with typed symbols, cut and pasted onto a collaged background of everyday articles and words such as ‘attractive choices’, ‘bigger’, ‘instant’. The scale of the work requires that we come close, peering into the sanitised and anonymous figures who seem dehumanised; individuality is expendable, identity is quantifiable only in terms of ownership and exchange. Their eyes of digits ‘0’ or ‘0’ are meticulously cut out and mounted onto the portraits that recall distinct emotions — puzzled, focused, anxious — within the media where there’s always something new, always a new trend, a new person to follow that you need to grapple with, to the point that you get exhausted. The format is fitting for the materials Choy is working with: his collection of photo slide shells which he had used to present his portfolio in the 2000s, snippets of mass-produced publishing, textures of paint

¹ Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. 1927. 1st ed., Wiley, 12 Oct. 1978.

and thumb prints. If we are used to thinking that digital portrayals will disclose the truth of their subjects to us, in Choy's hands, this promise of legibility is interrupted. And to look through the tangible windows created by photo slide shells which invade the work with nostalgia: when was the last time we really kept information and memories we once stored in our brain, rather than simply turning into the technology at the palm of our hand?

In the metadata of Choy's work is a dialogue on technocapitalism; in this case, our complacency towards it. Hungarian Bauhaus artist László Moholy-Nagy when adding finishing touches to his window displays for Simpson's department store in London in 1936, he expressed that 'the impact has to come from the familiar object presented in an unfamiliar way.'² Choy's painting '*Volatility*' (2020-2021) in a palette of red, yellow and blue makes this visible to us; topsy-turvy portraits and overlapping arrow symbols pointing to divergent paths that visually disrupts the sense of order, compels the viewer to keep looking, searching for a way to possess the work. Just as Choy's recontextualised tags of publicity materials denote consumerism, his arrow symbols against textured vertical lines allude to the back-forward buttons in algorithmic systems through form rather than in material. Volatile, our lives extend beyond these navigational pointers which are "direct and easily controlled." Our innovation, outfit of the day, or last fancy meal fuels the algorithm that offers space to personalised marketing. While the index of internet icons paves way for bespoke advertising, it is also a billowing unpredictability that threatens our freedom in the capitalist systems of control. As Choy's stark yellow arrows give the impression of a cautionary sign, the sentimental tone that wafts across his oeuvre overlays them with hope and strength. Examining the legacies of modernist movements, particularly Bauhaus and Constructivism, Choy has developed his

² Passuth, Krisztina. Moholy-Nagy. 1985. London, Thames and Hudson Inc., 1985, p. 65, monoskop.org/images/1/14/Moholy-Nagy_1985.pdf

own collection of pictorial codes. The interdependent parts of his carefully constructed compositions cannot be segregated but are held in gracefully balanced tension by the treatment of the painting as one holistic compound.

It is easy to leap into Choy's most prominent work '*Desiring Green Pastures*' (2020-2021) in the exhibition space at Wei-Ling Gallery; blue, oval faces dotted on green quilts of the earth juxtapose the warm hues of red, yellow and orange with tints of blue that permeate the room. It is interesting to find the pastoral piece collocated with a triptych '*Windows in the Night Sky: Lockdown Unbound*' (2020-2021) which mirrors adjoining flats in the urban landscape, echoing the artist's wistful relocation from a small town to the metropolitan setting. Yet surprisingly, *Desiring Green Pastures* is less about physical displacement, but rather, "a metaphor for my art practice and studio space that tune me back to the rhythm of us and what it means to be human again. And essentially, I want this for others," Choy remarked. Across '*Windows in the Night Sky: Lockdown Unbound*', anonymous faces on square tiles lift off the blue-red canvas like constellations, golden rooms glow in the city clutter at night. The painting offers a contradiction between the access to intimate lives of strangers through technology and the urban isolation we face in the Covid-19 lockdown. In Choy's artistic process that 'chooses to choose' through the push and pull practice of deconstructing and reviewing everyday contexts, his method of decision-making rooted in revision and latency presents a specific framework of agency: how time can be spent formulating decisions in relation to what you want something to be, embracing the liberation in refusing to act, in idling.

As in all of Choy's work in *Encountering Mass Man*, there is a delicate poise between its liberating power and fragile vulnerability. Although still adhering to hints of architecture and consumer kitsch aesthetics that illustrate his signature style, his latest body of work taps deeper into the human psyche through miniature, stylised faces who epitomise our inherent, modern contradictions. Moderately packing in his lampoon on throwaway culture, this series takes on a bittersweet note, paired with a renewed sublimity. One that distinguishes a maturity in Choy's practice and his endeavours to establish new parameters to pursue from. His individual paintings exist independently, yet collectively, they shape an alternative reality which touches on the artist's identity. Ultimately, the interpretation remains open for the viewer to project their own narratives and anecdotes. Returning to Heidegger's quote, 'Everyone is the other and no one is himself', it is difficult not to feel an urgency beneath Choy's vibrant paintings. Have we been lost in the algorithmic codes in an attempt to seek ourselves? *Encountering Mass Man* is a psychological stage on which a course of fundamental conundrums in contemporary life are acted out to allow a moment of reflection.

Celina Loh
2021



Volatility
Mixed media on jute canvas
198cm x 107cm
2020-2021



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Volatility (detail)

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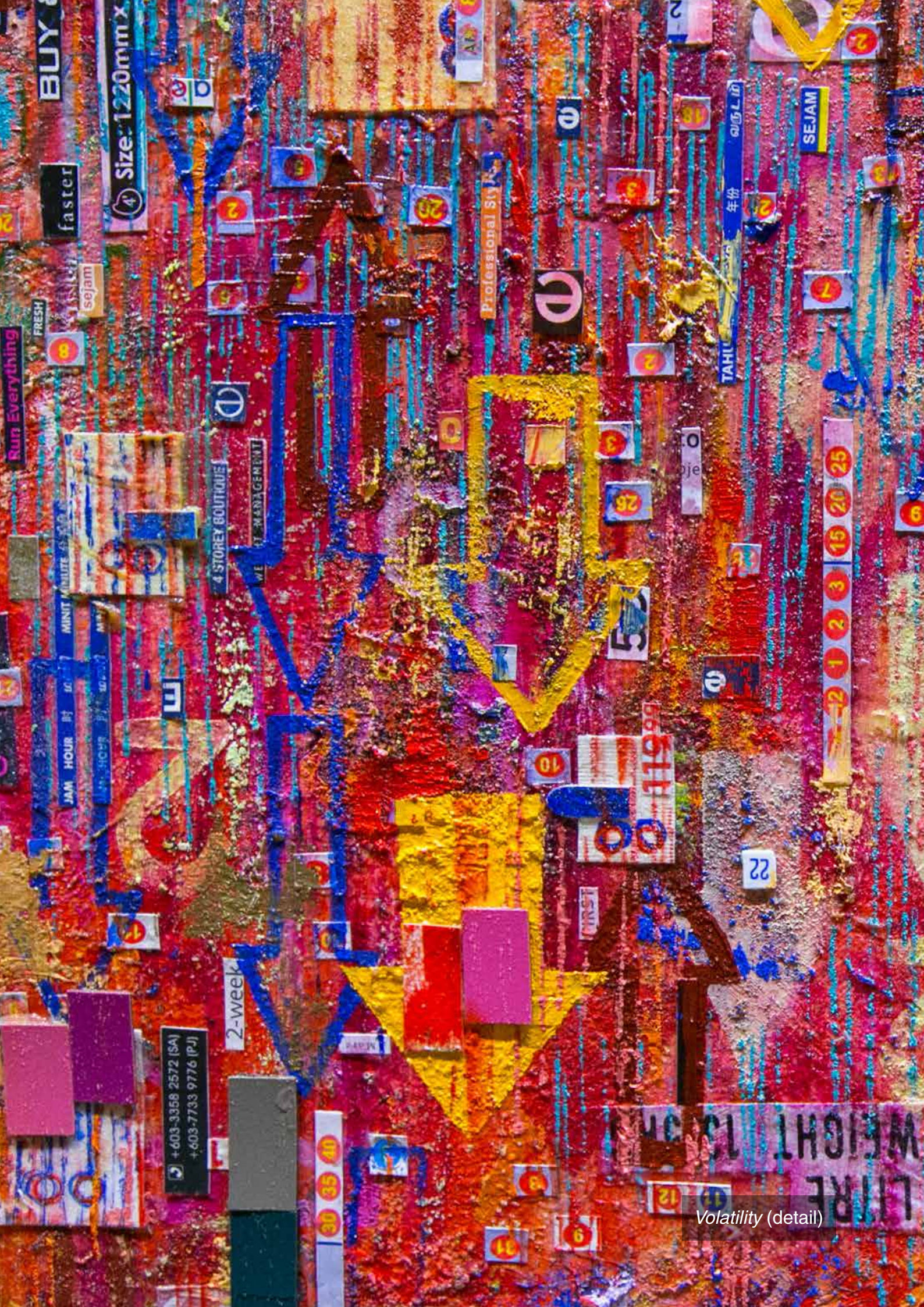


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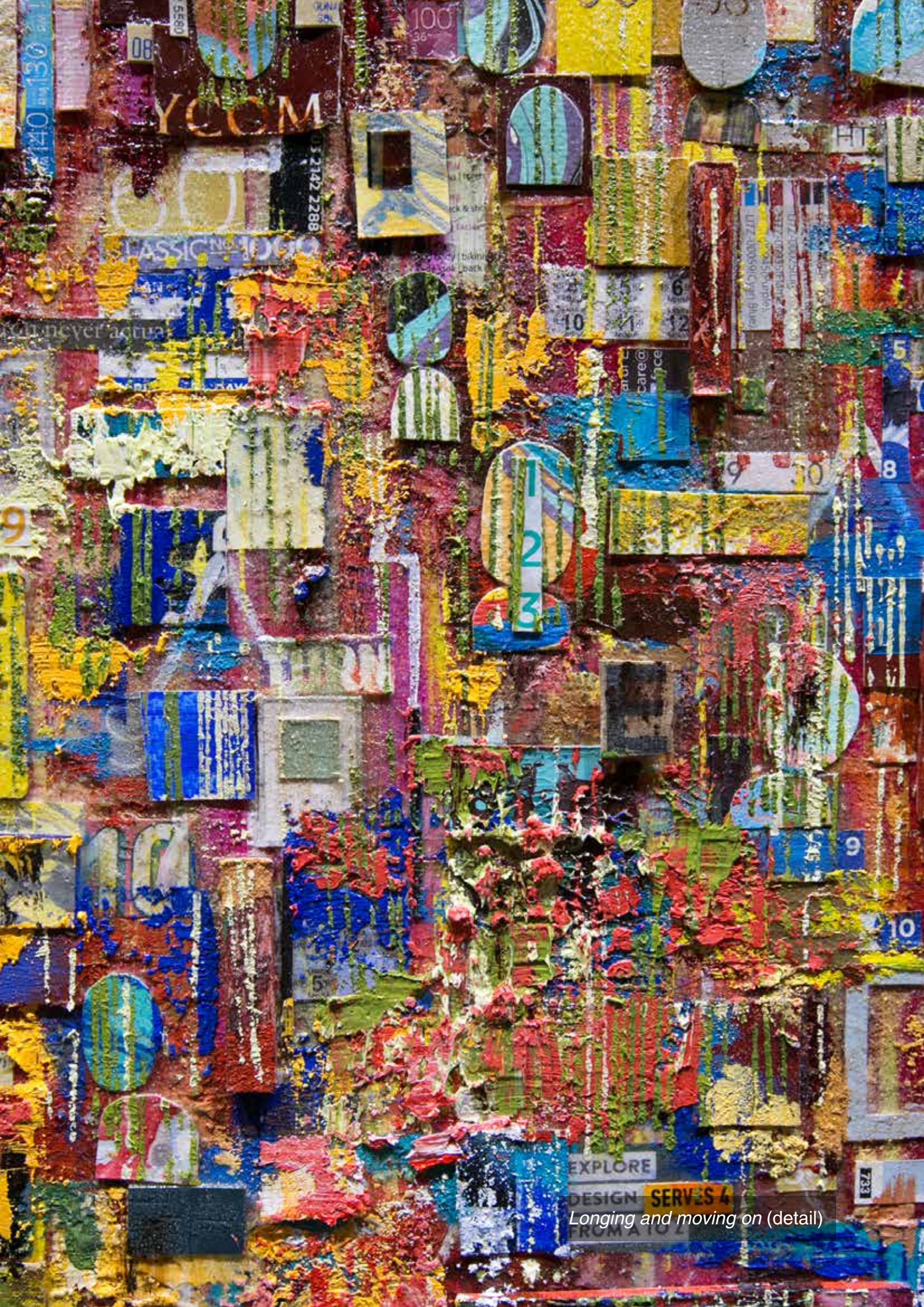
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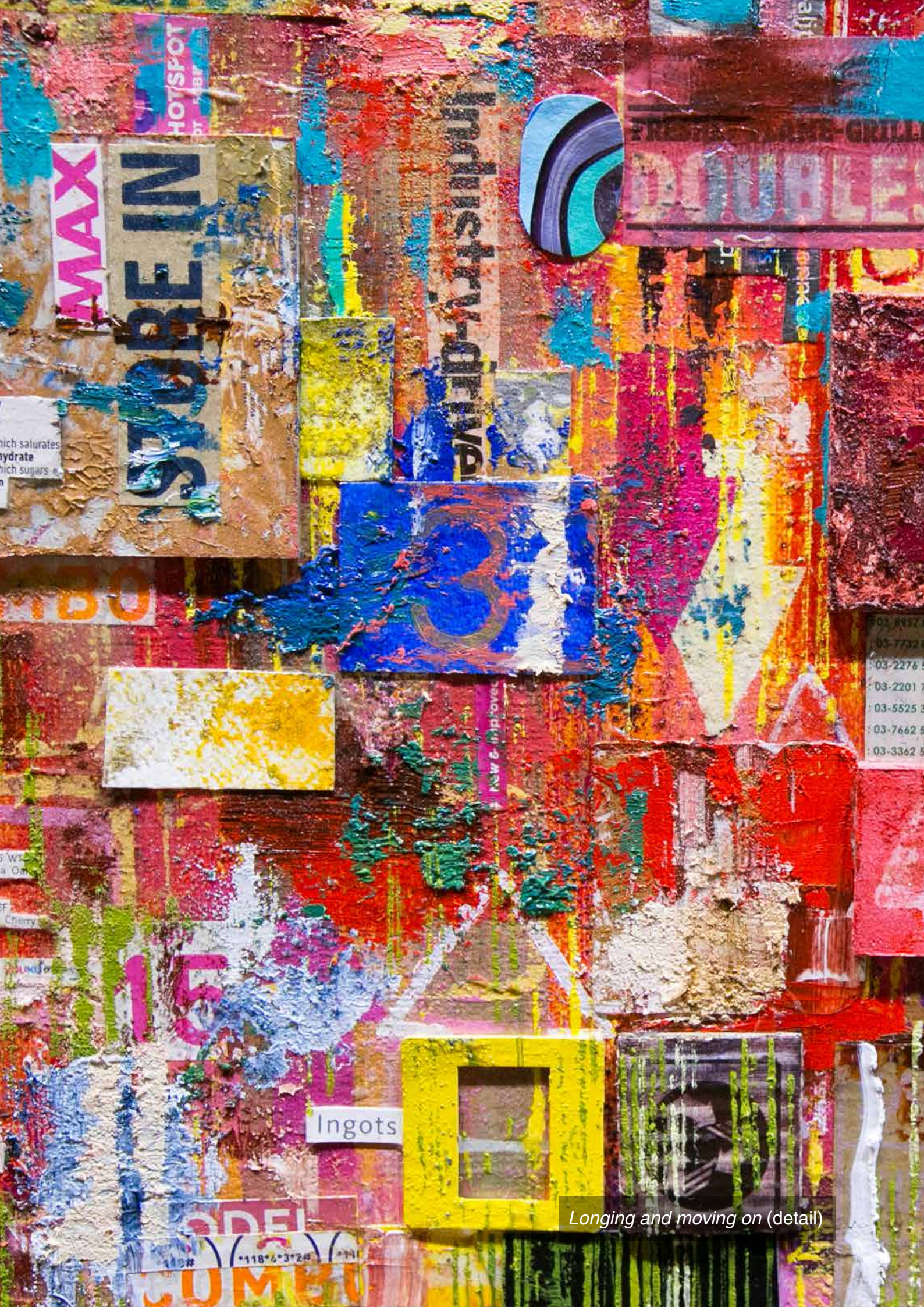
Volatility (detail)



Longing and moving on
Mixed media on jute canvas
168cm x 107cm
2020-2021



Longing and moving on (detail)



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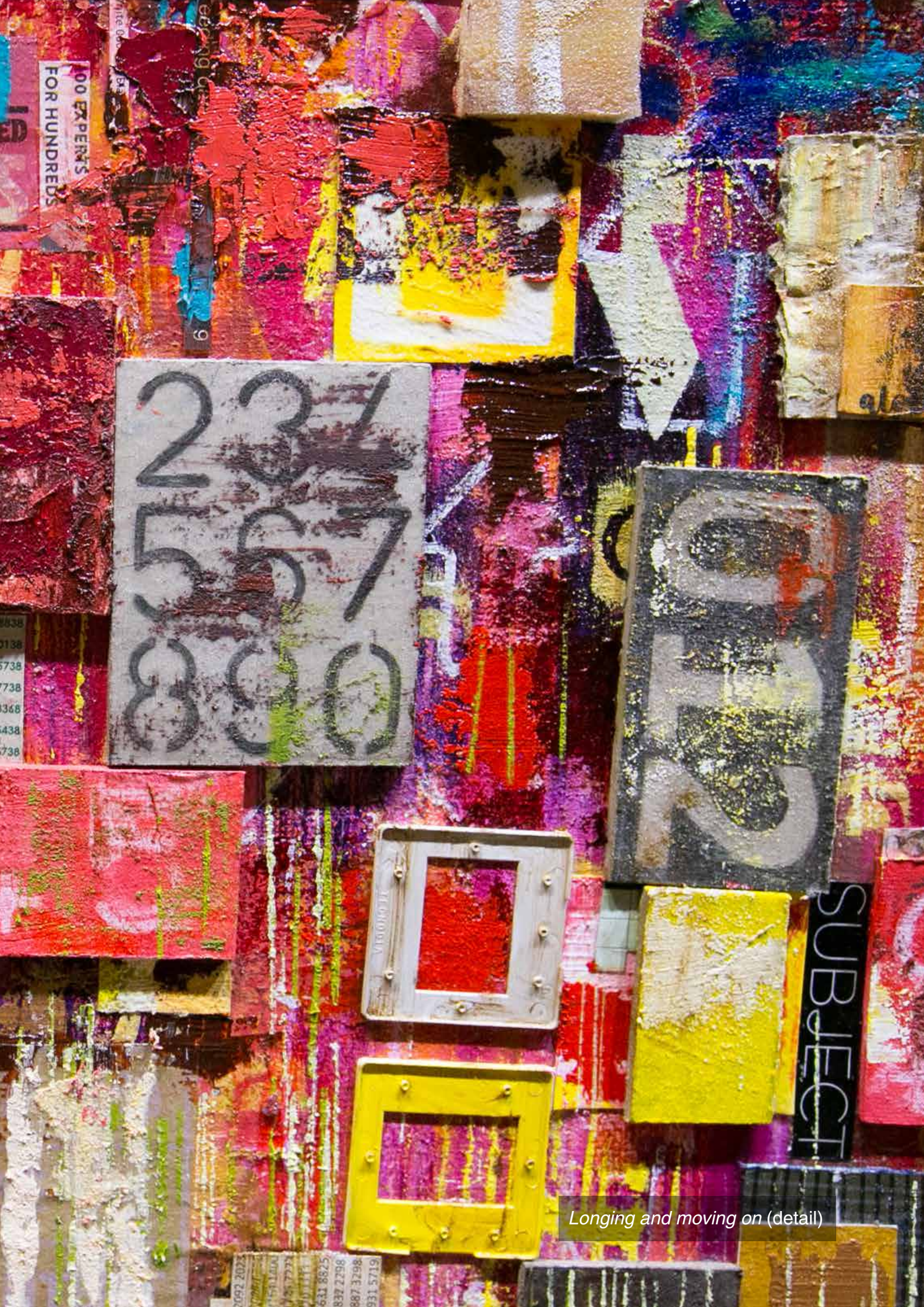
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Longing and moving on (detail)

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Grappling
Mixed media on jute canvas
168cm x 107cm
2020-2021

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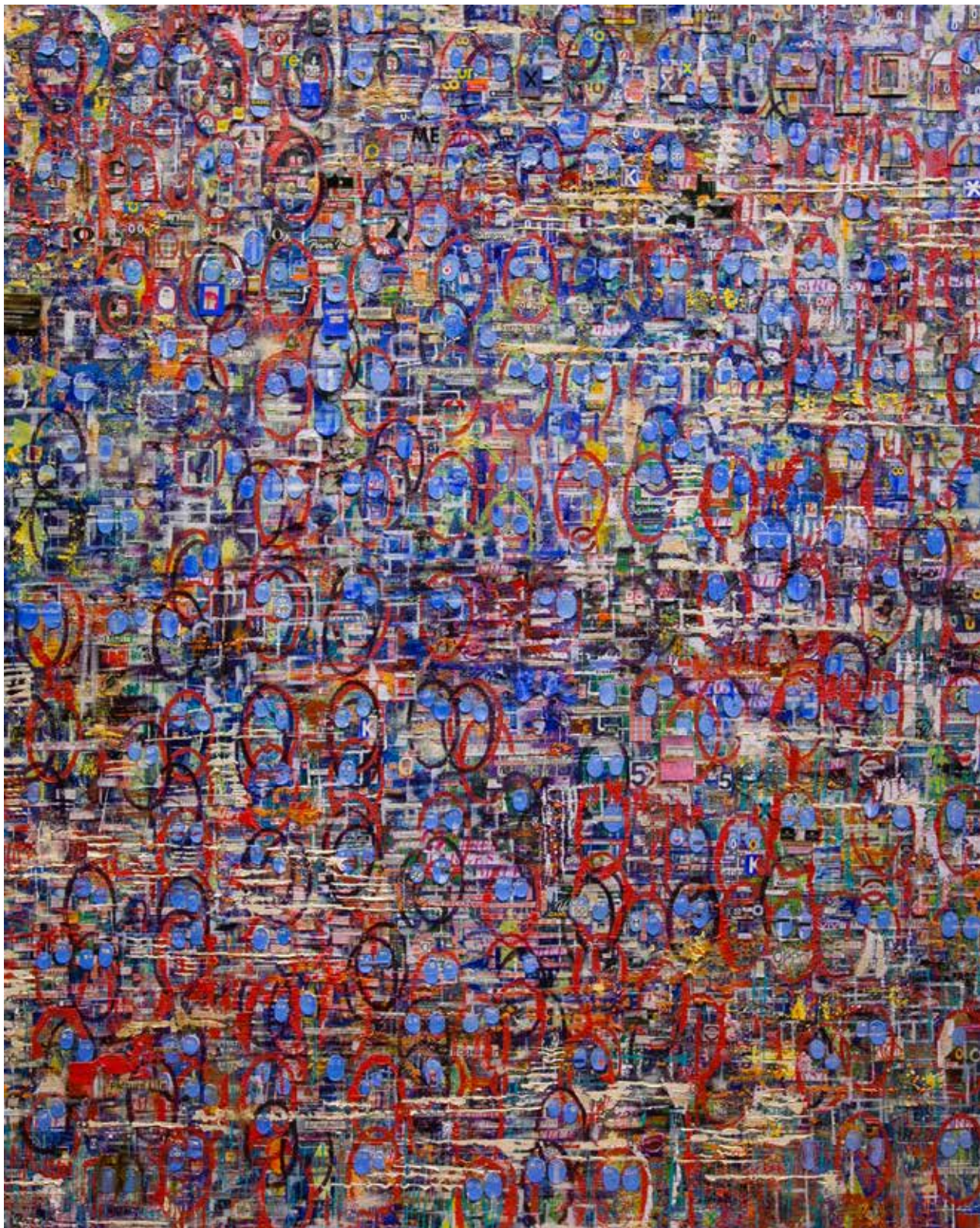
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Grappling (detail)



Moving Emojis
Mixed media on jute canvas
152.5cm x 122cm
2020-2021



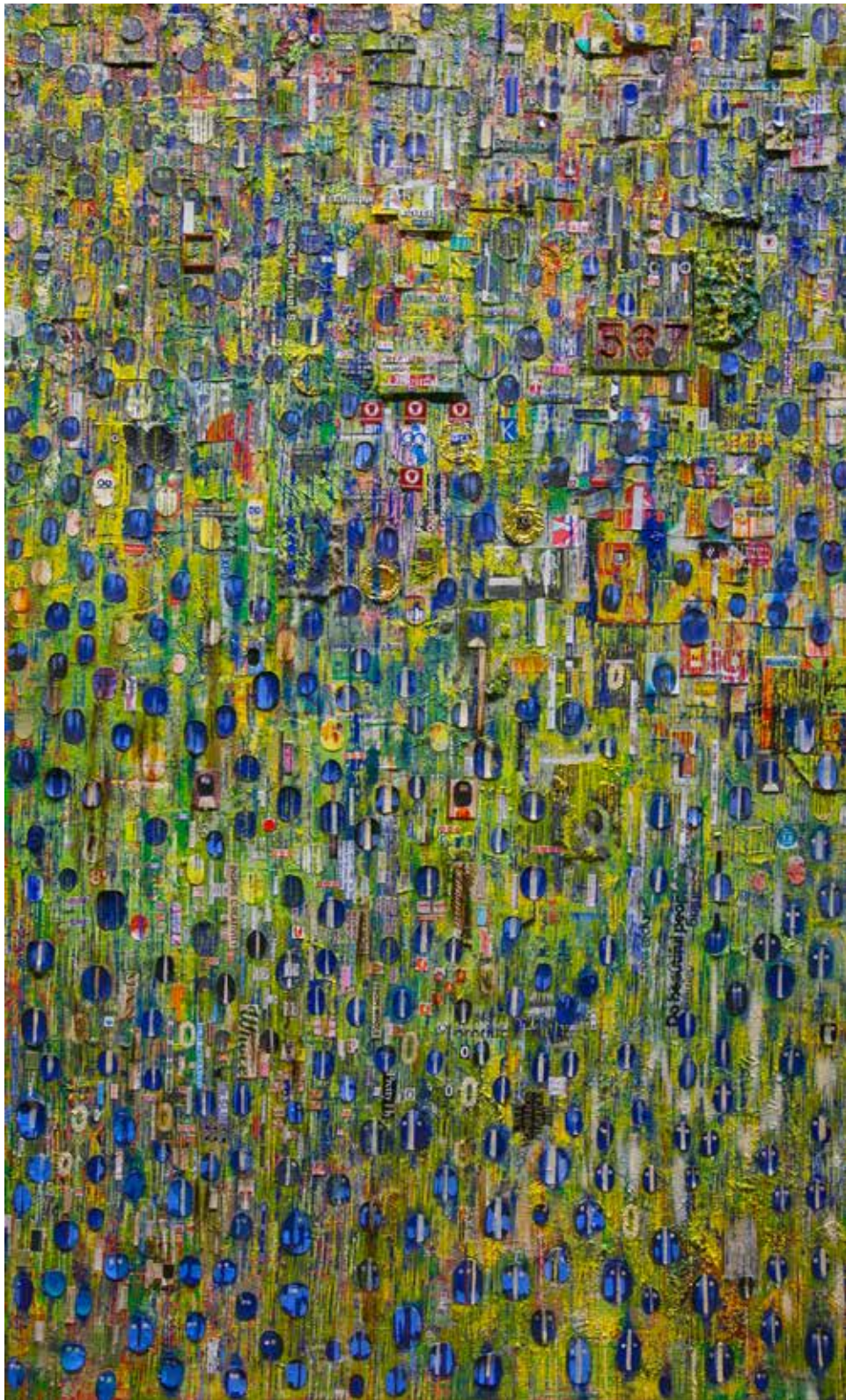
Delirious Chatters
Mixed media on jute canvas
153cm x 214cm
2020-2021



Delirious Chatters (detail)



Delirious Chatters (detail)



Desiring Green Pasture
Mixed media on jute canvas
149cm x 91.5cm
2020-2021



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Desiring Green Pasture (detail)

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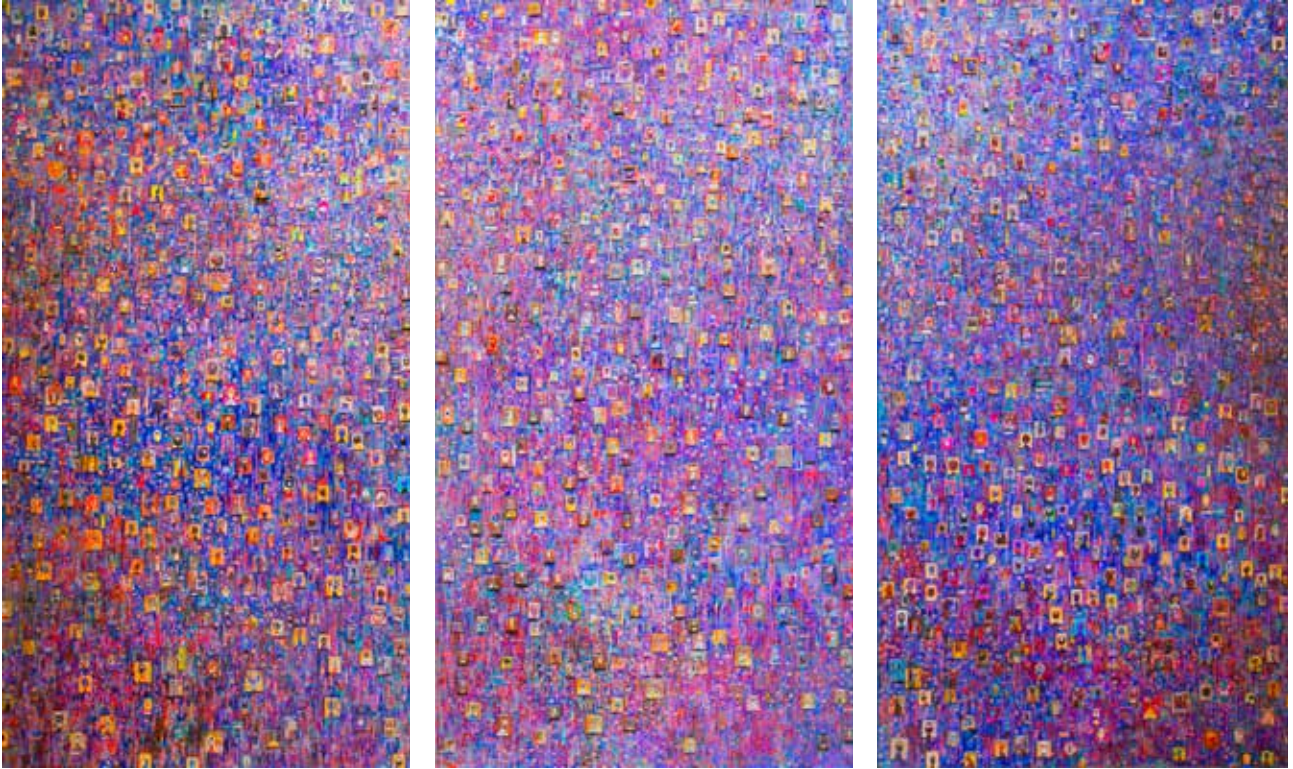


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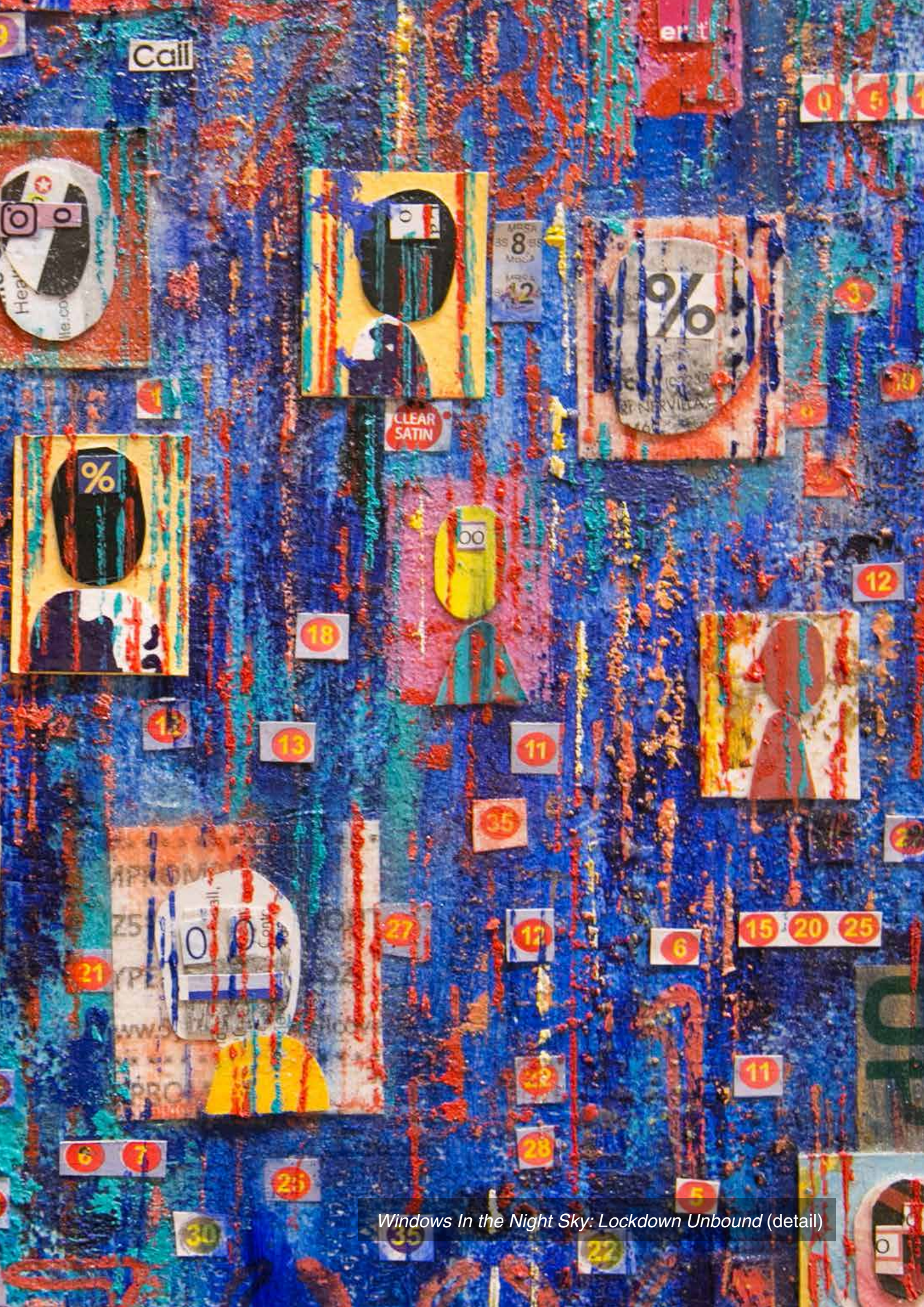
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Desiring Green Pasture (detail)



Windows In the Night Sky: Lockdown Unbound
Mixed media on jute canvas
198cm x 320cm (Triptych)
2020-2021



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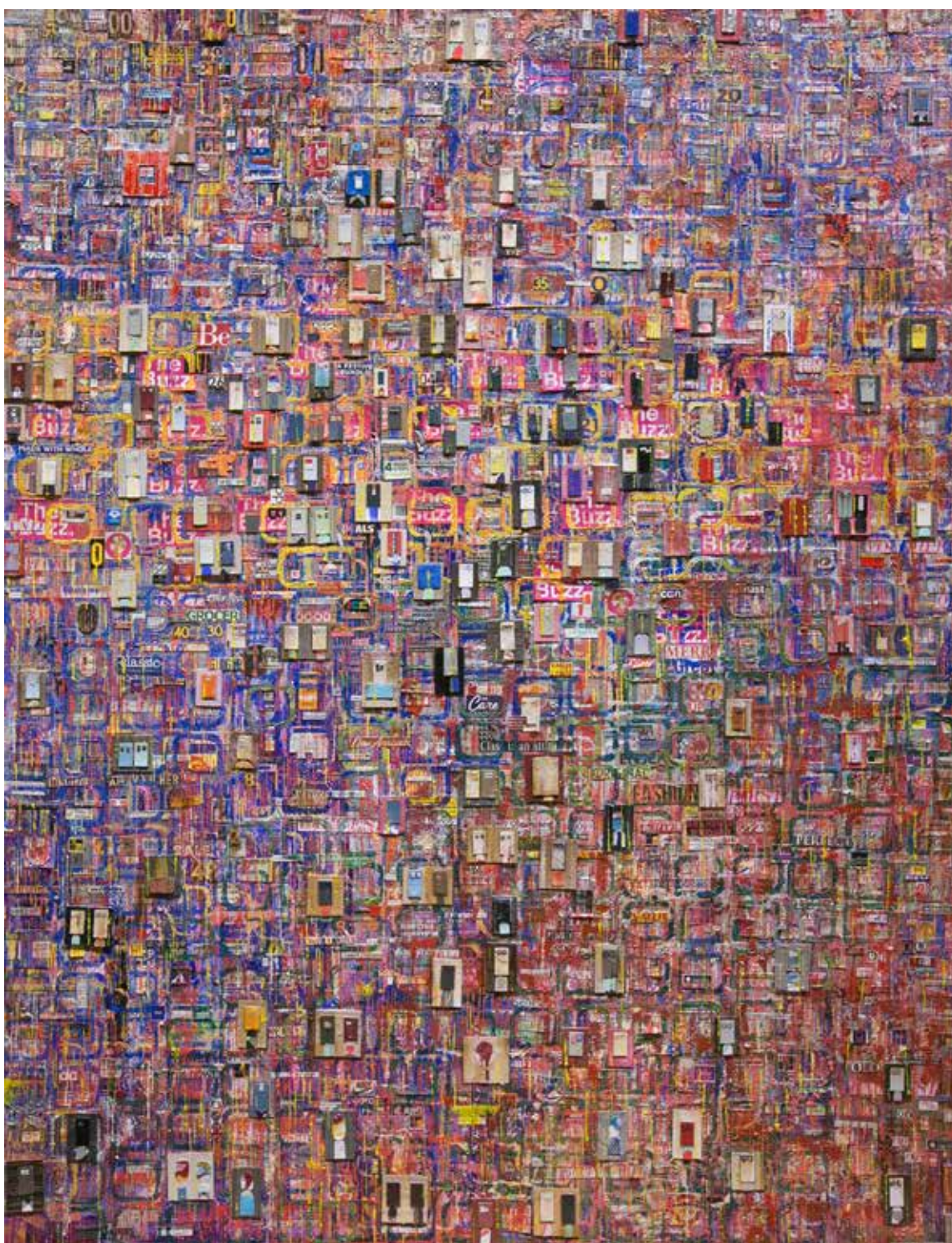
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Windows In the Night Sky: Lockdown Unbound (detail)



The Buzz
Mixed media on jute canvas
138cm x 107cm
2020-2021



The Buzz (detail)



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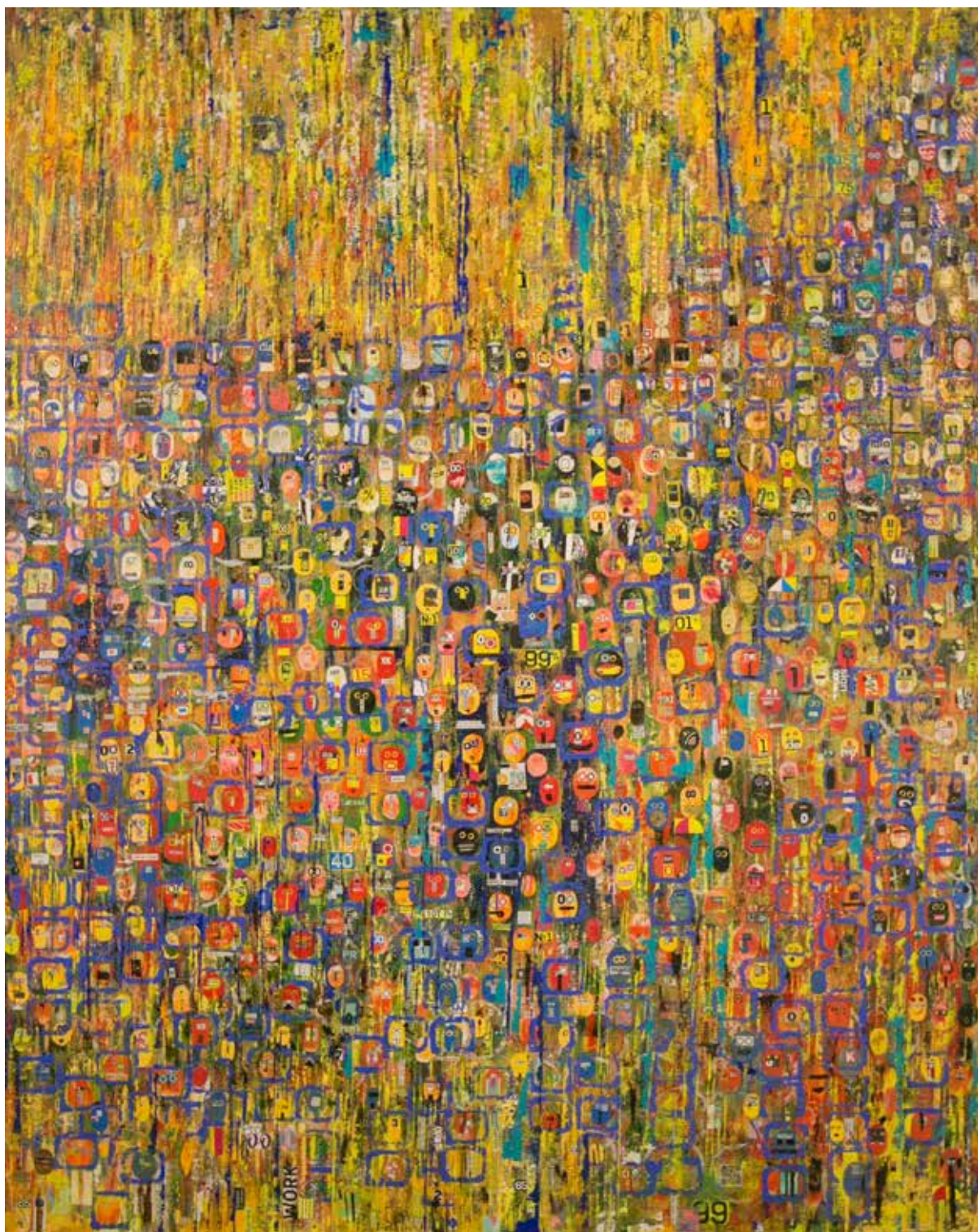
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The Buzz (detail)



Screen Chatters: Grappling for 15 minutes of Hope
Mixed media on jute canvas
152.5cmx 122cm
2021



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Screen Chatters: Grappling for 15 minutes of Hope (detail)



Screen Chatters: Grappling for 15 minutes of Hope (detail)

BRANDS



Screen Chatters: Grappling for 15 minutes of Hope (detail)









CHOY CHUN WEI (B. 1973)



Choy Chun Wei is an artist whose predilections and ideals of art are based predominantly on design language. His immersion in Graphic Design studies at the tertiary level has provided design oriented conceptual reading and contextual imagination into his chosen practice in the fine arts. This confluence of design and fine art is germane to an exciting development of his art, clearly distinguishing Chun Wei from his contemporaries. An articulate and demanding artist, Chun Wei is never one to rest on his laurels constantly seeking to develop and improve himself as an artist. Already an established artist in the Malaysian art scene, Choy Chun Wei is much sought after by Malaysian public collections, as well as, international collectors.

His multi-layered collage works, have occasionally been misconstrued as being located within the premise of abstraction, however the intent of the artist was to use this abstraction as an entry point for viewers to partake in his pictorial dialogue. Through the compactness and tensions created from the placement of different mediums on a canvas, his works possess a tactile quality. This constant need to experiment with and discover new materials, lend his works an edge which deviate from the conventional or expected.

Upon moving from the countryside, to an urban city environment, it changed his perception of space, where little pockets of green, became big structures with artificial lights. This shift affected the way he perceived the world –a world where he now felt suffocated and encroached upon– and in turn, the way his works were made

changed.

Material and material culture are therefore, also important considerations in his practice, highlighting the influence of 'seeing' as the crucial element in the identification of texts and found objects within his dense, intricate collages.

The significance of objects are related directly to Malaysian material culture, as he is interested in exploring the process of seeing, and to a further extent how seeing leads to the selection and handling of materials. Due to the different properties of layered objects and its transformations. The dialogue for his works run around the entire canvas, generating visual stimulations at different trajectories. Each piece is carefully formulated to reflect highly-layered surfaces mapped in a convoluted manner. Hence the textures, correlation and intertwined compositions provide fresh openings to discuss the mediums and their interlocked connotations. Though visually similar in some ways, every piece displays its own characteristics.

He has always been captivated by the inherent meanings that come with fonts and texts. Simple words like 'go' and 'new' are indications or markers, for him to create narrative(s) within a painting. Significant found words are important to the construction of a dialogue within his pieces, conveying pertinent and recurring subliminal messages that form a personal dialogue of his concerns interrelated with his life and work.

In 2014, he was the only Malaysian artist to present a solo booth at 'Insights', the curated

section of Art Basel Hong Kong. For this project, the artist used the large number of visitors to ABHK as his source of inspiration, hoping to embark on an art-making process that involves collecting visitor's personal information and representing it as art. With the advent of the world we live in today - gadgets, computers, brands, smartphones - the presence and essence of each individual human being is often overlooked, replaced instead by material goods, and this is where the seed of *The Human Landscape* was conceived. The result: one gargantuan painting on canvas, which required human interaction in order for it to be completed.

His 2017 series '*Tectonic Traces*', marked a progression from his previous works, notably through the process of assembling more relief and adding more layers to his collages. Pushing boundaries through the use of tectonic materials, the works in the series accentuate the complexities and contradictions inherent in life's fragments. Dealing with information and facts, at the same time interrogating our current state of mind, Chun Wei observes how our identity is transforming into numbers and codes.

EDUCATION

- 2016 Master of Arts (Visual Art), University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
1998 BA (Hons) Graphic Design, School of Art & Design, Central Saint Martins, London, England

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2021 Encountering Mass Man, Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
2017 Tectonic Traces, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
2016 Investigating Materiality Through Art-Based Research, Piyadasa Gallery, Cultural Centre, University Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
2015 Unknown Landscape, Art Stage Singapore, Marina Bay Sands, Singapore
2014 The Human Landscape, Art Basel Hong Kong, Hong Kong Convention Centre, Hong Kong
2011 Here and Now, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
2008 Trails, Red Mill Gallery, Vermont, United States
2007 Kaleidoscopic Landscapes, Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2019 18@8 Turning Points, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Art Jakarta 2019, Jakarta Convention Center (JCC) Senayan, Jakarta, Indonesia
2018 Patriots: By Malaysians for Malaysians, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Teh Tarik with The Flag, curated by Wei-Ling Gallery, in association with The National Visual Arts Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Art Stage Singapore, Marina Bay Sands, Singapore
2017 18@8 RIGHT HERE! RIGHT NOW!, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
2016 Art Stage Singapore, Marina Bay Sands, Singapore
The Past Is Never Where You Think You Left It, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
2015 Prudential Eye-Zone, Art Science Museum, Singapore
18@8 Heirlooms, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
2014 The Space Between, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
The PEAK Group Show- HO MIA, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
2013 18@8 Mirror, Mirror on the wall, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
2012 18@8: KUL-SIN, ION Art, Singapore
18@8: KUL-SIN, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Timeless, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Snapshots, WWF Art for Nature, Rimbun Dahan, Seangor, Malaysia
2011 Art Stage Singapore, Marina Bay Sands, Singapore
2010 Negaraku: Nationalism and Patriotism in Malaysian Contemporary Art, The Aliya and Farouk Khan Collection, Galeria Sri Perdana, Kuala Lumpur
Survival, WWF Art for Nature, Rimbun Dahan, Selangor, Malaysia
Absolut 18@8, Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

- 2009 Iskandar Malaysia Contemporary Art Show (IMCAS), Danga Bay City Mall, Johor, Malaysia
Tanah Air, WWF Art for Nature, Rimbun Dahan, Selangor, Malaysia
- 2008 Shifting Boundaries, WWF Art for Nature, Rimbun Dahan, Selangor, Malaysia
18@8 Vice & Virtue, Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Tukar Ganti: New Malaysian Paintings, Valentine Willie Fine Art Singapore, HT Contemporary Space, Singapore
La Galleria, Pall Mall, London, United Kingdom
China International Gallery Exposition (CIGE), China World Trade Center, Beijing, China
Force of Nature, Pace Gallery, Malaysia
- 2007 00:15 Sperstar, WWF Art for Nature, Rimbun Dahan, Selangor, Malaysia
Artriangle: Malaysia Philippines Indonesia, Soko Gakkai Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Between Generations: 50 Years Across Modern Art in Malaysia, Asian Art Museum, University of Malaya, Selangor, Malaysia & Muzium dan Galeri Tuanku Fauziah, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia
- 2006 Rimbun Dahan Artist in Residency Show, Rimbun Dahan, Selangor, Malaysia
Signed and Dated, Valentine Willie Fine Art 10th Anniversary, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Feed Me! An Exploration of Appetities, WWF Art for Nature, Rimbun Dahan, Selangor, Malaysia
18@8 KUL-KARACHI, Pakistan Show, Amin Gulgee Gallery, Karachi, Pakistan
- 2005 Rooster Mania, Townhouse Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
The Power of Dreaming: Taman Sari, The Garden of Delight and Identity, WWF Art for Nature, Rimbun Dahan, Selangor, Malaysia
18@8, Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Art Below 1000, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Free Show, Reka Art Space, Selangor, Malaysia
- 2004 Young Contemporary Finalist Exhibition, National Visual Arts Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Paradise Lost/Paradise Found, WWF Art for Nature, Rimbun Dahan, Selangor, Malaysia
Home Improvement, Two-person Show, Reka Art Space, Malaysia
Semangat: Artists for Theater, Fundraising Exhibition for 5 Arts Centre, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Art Below 1000, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Fifteen, Darling Muse Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Free Show, Reka Art Space, Malaysia
- 2003 Philip Morris Art Exhibition, National Visual Arts Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Games We Play, WWF Art for Nature, Rimbun Dahan, Singapore, Malaysia
Art Below 1000, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2002 Touch, WWF Art for Nature, Rimbun Dahan, Malaysia
Works on Paper, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2001 Open Show, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Inhabitant: Two Person Show, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Exhibit A: Malaysian Still life, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

- Art Below 1000, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2000 Art Below 1000, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 1999 Aku: Portret Diri 99, Petronas Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 1998 Mental Saint Tart Tins, Degree Show, Long Acre, London, United Kingdom
- 1997 Young Designers, Malaysian Design Council, Menara Tan & Tan, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 1996 WaterWorld, Bank Negara, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 1995 Dialogue, Maybank Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

AWARDS

- 2007/2008 Vermont Studio Center Asian Artist Fellowship, Vermont Studio Center, United States
- 2005 Artist in Residence, Rimbun Dahan, Malaysia
- 2004 Juror's Choice Award (2D category), Bakat Muda Sezaman (Malaysian Young Contemporary)
- 2003 Honourable Mention, Philip Morris Malaysia / Asean Art Awards
- 1997 The London Institute (University of Arts, London) Full Scholarship
- 1995 Higher National Diploma (HND) Teo Soo Ching Full Scholarship

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

- National Visual Arts Gallery, Malaysia
- Bank Negara Malaysia
- Hijjas Kasturi Association / Rimbun Dahan, Malaysia
- Aliya and Farouk Khan collection
- Architron Design Consultants
- Veritas Design Group, Malaysia
- Australian International School, Malaysia
- Zain & Co. Advocates and Solicitors
- Edward Soo & Co. Advocates and Solicitors
- Seksan Design
- CWL Design, Malaysia
- Amerada Hess, Malaysia
- Big Dutchman Asia
- IJM Corporation Berhad
- The Bank of Singapore
- The Zain Azahari Collection
- Shiseido
- MAXIS



Wei-Ling Gallery

Produced by **Wei-Ling Gallery**

To accompany the exhibition entitled '*Encountering Mass Man*' by Choy Chun Wei
from 2 March- 10 April 2021

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Cover image: *Delirious Chatters* (detail) (2020 - 2021)