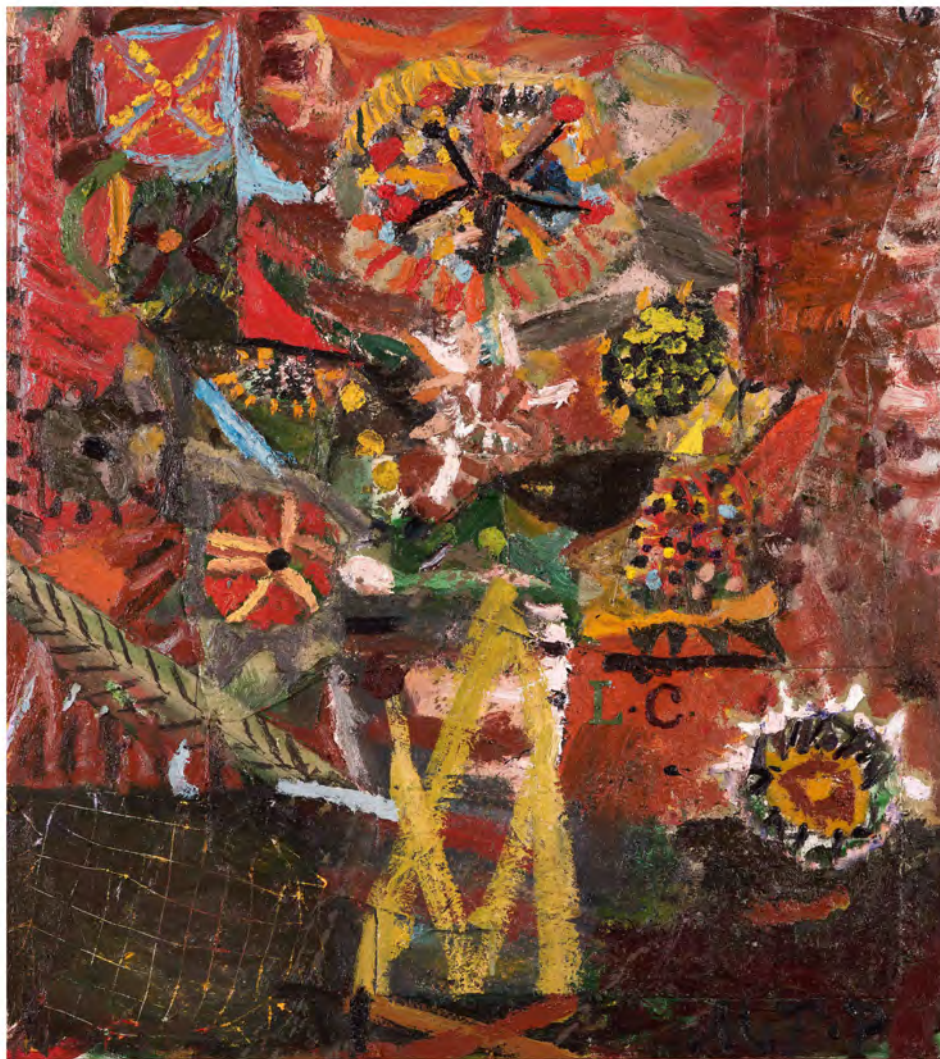


# JAMES DRINKWATER

I LOVE YOU MORE THAN PAINTINGS



NICHOLAS  
THOMPSON  
GALLERY

15 APRIL TO 3 MAY 2020

## I LOVE YOU MORE THAN PAINTINGS

**There is a generosity to James Drinkwater's work that lures you in. It's there in his robust application of paint and rich materials, and also in the vulnerability contained within his art. A part of this artist's life is inscribed into each of his works, which chronicle the contours of his existence. In Issue 47, Drinkwater sat down with Artist Profile to reflect upon his practice.**

### **How do you describe your artistic practice to strangers?**

When people ask, I always tell them that I'm a house painter – because I'm inevitably covered in paint. It's trickier when someone probes a little further. I'm a painter-sculptor. I'm the son of schoolteachers so I saw people get up and go to work every day. I feel like a worker, but ultimately, I suppose, I'm an artist. I guess, I make journal entries about my life, and the medium I use is paint. I'm trying to document the passage of time, so each picture is the result of an experience or an event. After all that, people look at me bemused – and wish they didn't ask!

### **Why do you think the labels of 'painter' or 'sculptor' rest more comfortably with you than 'artist'?**

My heroes were all of that ilk – Fred Williams, Leonard French, Joan Mitchell and Lee Krasner – they were all workers and painters. I also think that that way of reducing down is very Australia centric – we try not to give what we do too much gravity. But I think it levels it all out, you know. You're a painter, you're a sculptor, you're a plumber, you're a butcher. I like that. It gives people an entry. It isn't alienating, it's an opening rather than a statement.

### **So what inspires you as a painter-sculptor?**

It's kind of abstract, but I see my life as entering and exiting a series of theatres. The ocean is a theatre, my studio is a theatre and my kitchen is a theatre filled with drama and intimacy and chaos. My input is found in these everyday theatres. For instance, my painting James James Ocean Face (2018) has my children and my partner in it, wrestling their way down to the ocean. Now that I'm living in Newcastle again, I'm forced to go back through the halls of my youth to these theatres, through the lens of my own children. I started calling my son 'Ocean Face' about twelve months ago, and he asked me 'Dad, why do you call me that?' and I replied, 'Because, my boy, your face contains the entire contents of the sea.' And he totally got it. There is something so magnificent about that.

### **You have moved around a lot, from Newcastle to Sydney to Melbourne to Berlin to Paris; how does place affect your work?**

For a lot of years, I thought that I had to go somewhere exotic – the desert in Kenya, or Tahiti, or the south of France, or Paris – those locations felt like important pilgrimages for me. But I realised more and more that all you have to be is available; it doesn't matter where you are.

### **Tell me a little bit more about that idea of availability.**

So last night we were at S.H. Ervin Gallery for the twentieth anniversary of the Brett Whiteley Travelling Art Scholarship, and my painting, Port

de Bras (2014) was there. It was good to see it again, all these years on. It has these distinct three-pronged little titanium white marks on it. I had a studio at the time in an abandoned glass factory, and I got in one morning and pigeons had walked through white paint then all over the works that were lying around, leaving three-pronged groupings all over the paintings. At first, I felt pure terror and shock – my show was the next week! – and then I thought, ‘How wonderful, I never in my wildest dreams would have gotten three tiny brushes and dipped them in white. How lucky am I?’. I think that speaks to the idea that everything is of value, everything is useful. It was a turning point for me.

**Just how important is the idea of play to your work?**

To make art, I think you have to be in the sandpit. There is a laborious manual element to my work, but within those long hours is when you stumble and arrive at the ‘genius’ – that thing that you’ve been searching for. My practice isn’t methodical. I almost see it as a voyage of sorts; you strap yourself to the mast of a ship – I know this sounds dramatic – and you set out to sea. Hopefully, eventually, you find land. People ask ‘How do you know when a picture is finished?’: when it feels authentically me, when I’ve arrived back to myself. You have to leave yourself and explore new terrain to discover more about yourself. One painting I did called Arriving in the East End (2018) is a triple portrait of (my partner) Lottie and my two children – and it’s about that. It’s about departing and arriving all in one.

**Did you always know that you were going to be an artist?**

Growing up, we went to church on Sundays and my parents had various ways of keeping the four children quiet during the service: a crossword for my brother, books for my sisters, and it was always drawing for me. Drawing was a compulsion. I don’t look back on those works and think that they were particularly brilliant, or better than my two-year-old peers, (laughs) but there is a sincerity and conviction about them. Moving forward to when I was about seven or eight, we would be tearing around my cousins’ house, playing tips on roller-skates, and my aunty would sit at her kitchen table listening to Jethro Tull and Paul Simon, smoking fags and drinking cups of tea, and she would paint these very beautiful landscapes. I think if she were born in a different generation she might have been a full-time painter too, but it just wasn’t taken seriously back then. I was so enchanted by this act – it presented the practice, the ceremony. I was totally seduced by the whole thing.

**You’ve done so many fantastic things, but what would you point to as your proudest artistic achievement?**

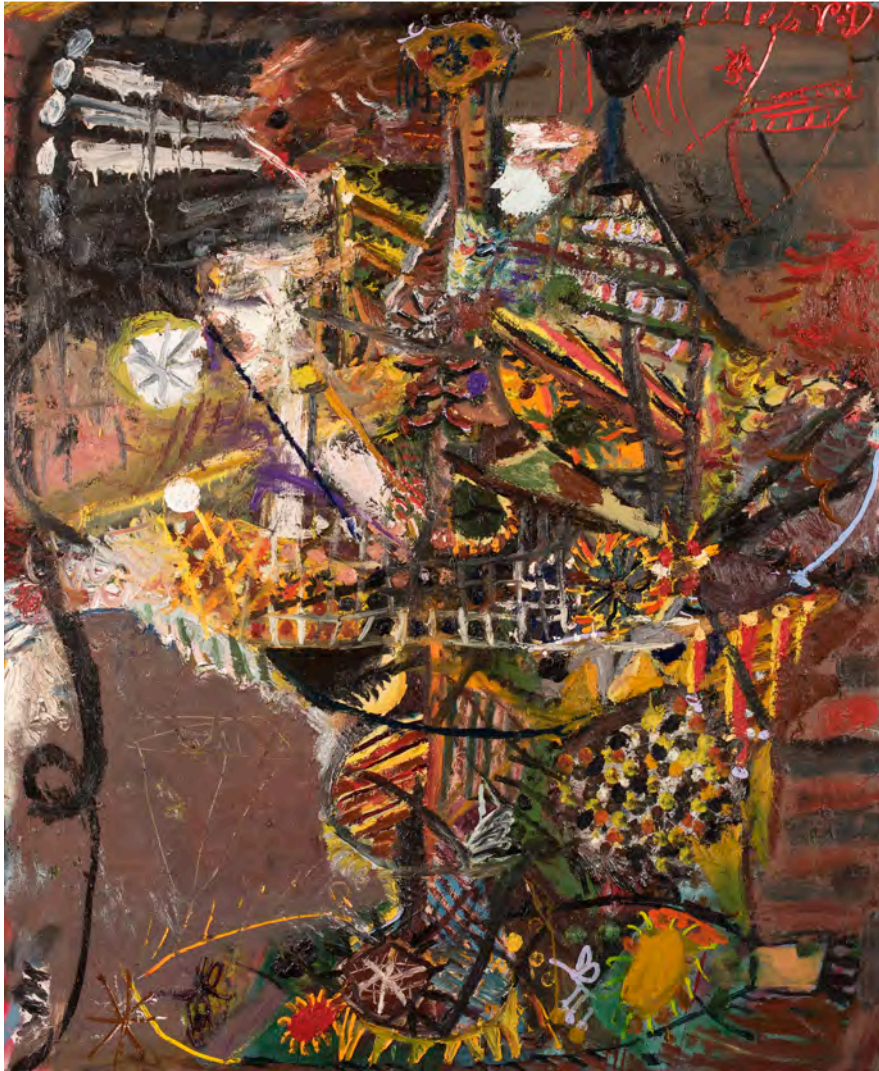
I think the most triumphant thing is that I get to come to my studio every day and nobody can tell me that I can’t. I get to come to my sandpit.

This interview was originally published in Artist Profile, [Issue 47](#), 2019



James Drinkwater in his Newcastle studio, 2019. Photograph Dean Beletich

NICHOLAS  
THOMPSON  
GALLERY



**JAMES DRINKWATER**

*I am a boat - the contents of my life*

2020

oil on canvas

198 x 163 cm

NICHOLAS  
THOMPSON  
GALLERY



**JAMES DRINKWATER**

*Arranging flowers while waiting for the green car*

2020

oil on hardboard

122.5 x 110 cm

NICHOLAS  
THOMPSON  
GALLERY



**JAMES DRINKWATER**

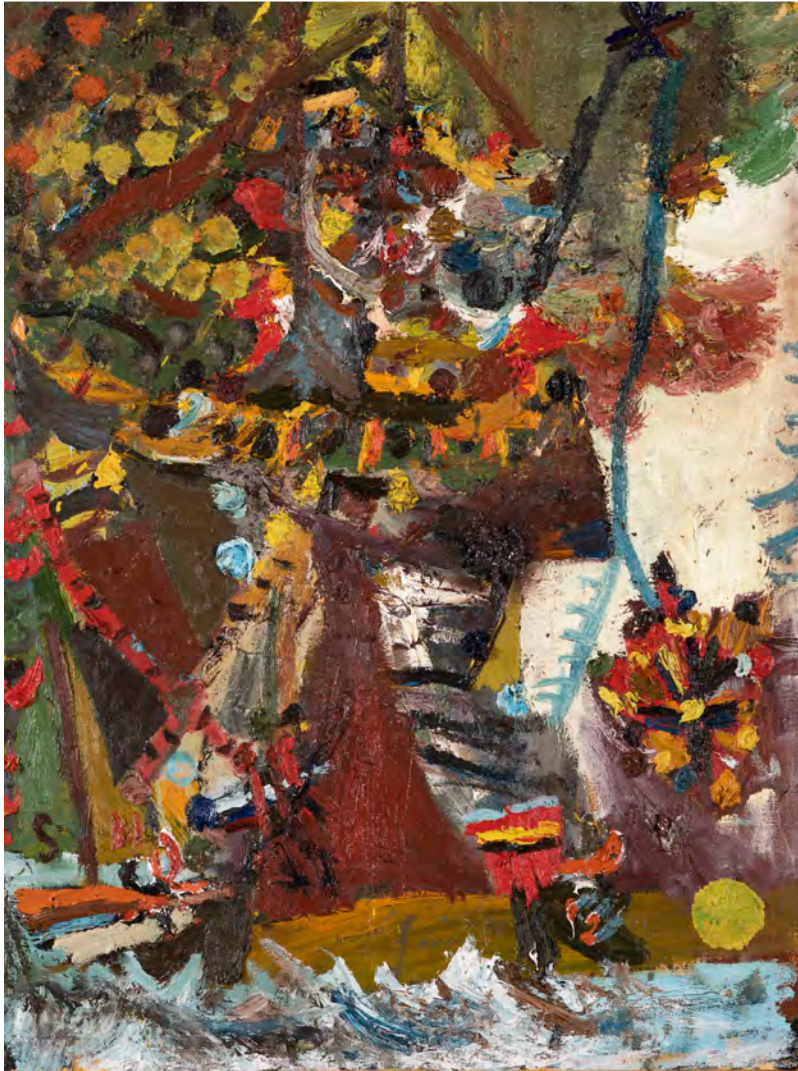
*R A F T*

2020

oil on mirror and ornate frame

80 x 110 cm

NICHOLAS  
THOMPSON  
GALLERY



**JAMES DRINKWATER**

*1000 ideas for the rainy day*

2020

oil on linen

112 x 77 cm



NICHOLAS  
THOMPSON  
GALLERY



**JAMES DRINKWATER**

*Alone at sea*

2020

oil on linen

77 x 112 cm

NICHOLAS  
THOMPSON  
GALLERY



**JAMES DRINKWATER**

*Emblematic figure with street lamp*

2020

oil on linen

112 x 77 cm

NICHOLAS  
THOMPSON  
GALLERY



**JAMES DRINKWATER**

*I pass the working harbour*

2020

oil on linen

77 x 112 cm

NICHOLAS  
THOMPSON  
GALLERY



**JAMES DRINKWATER**

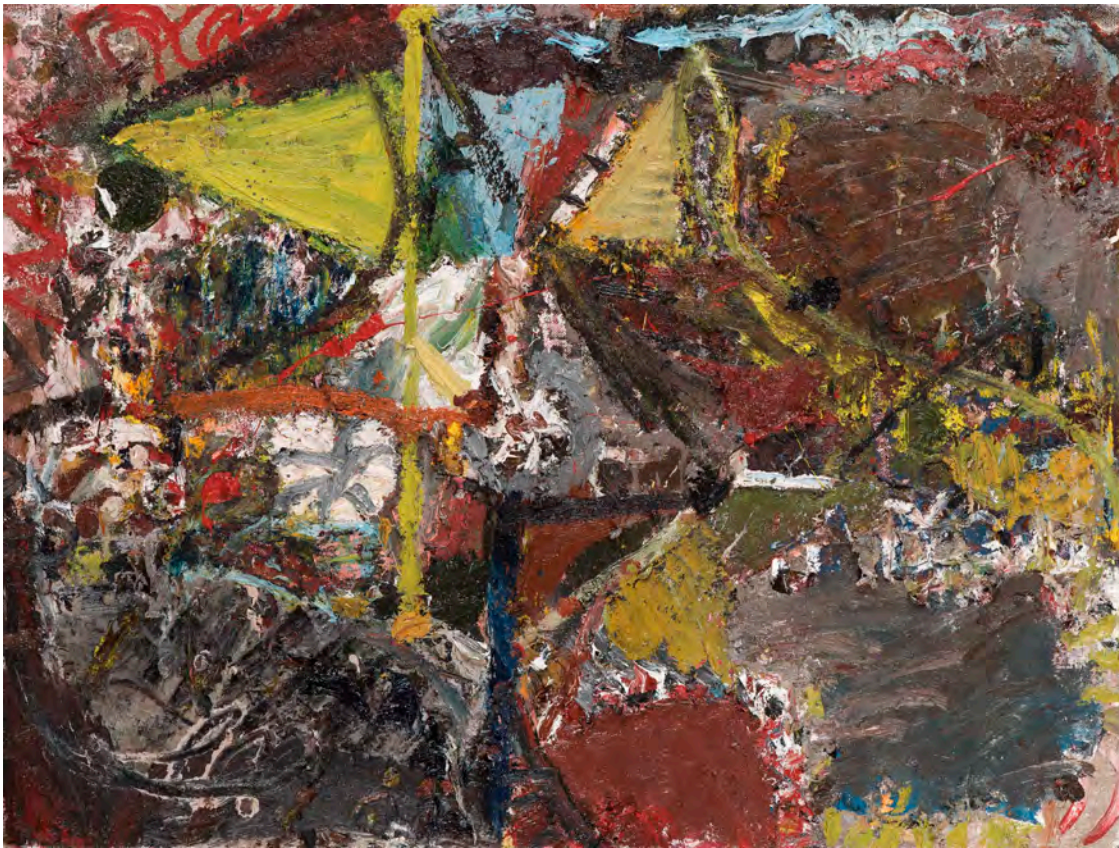
*I took the boy to Luna Park*

2020

oil on linen

77 x 112 cm

NICHOLAS  
THOMPSON  
GALLERY



**JAMES DRINKWATER**

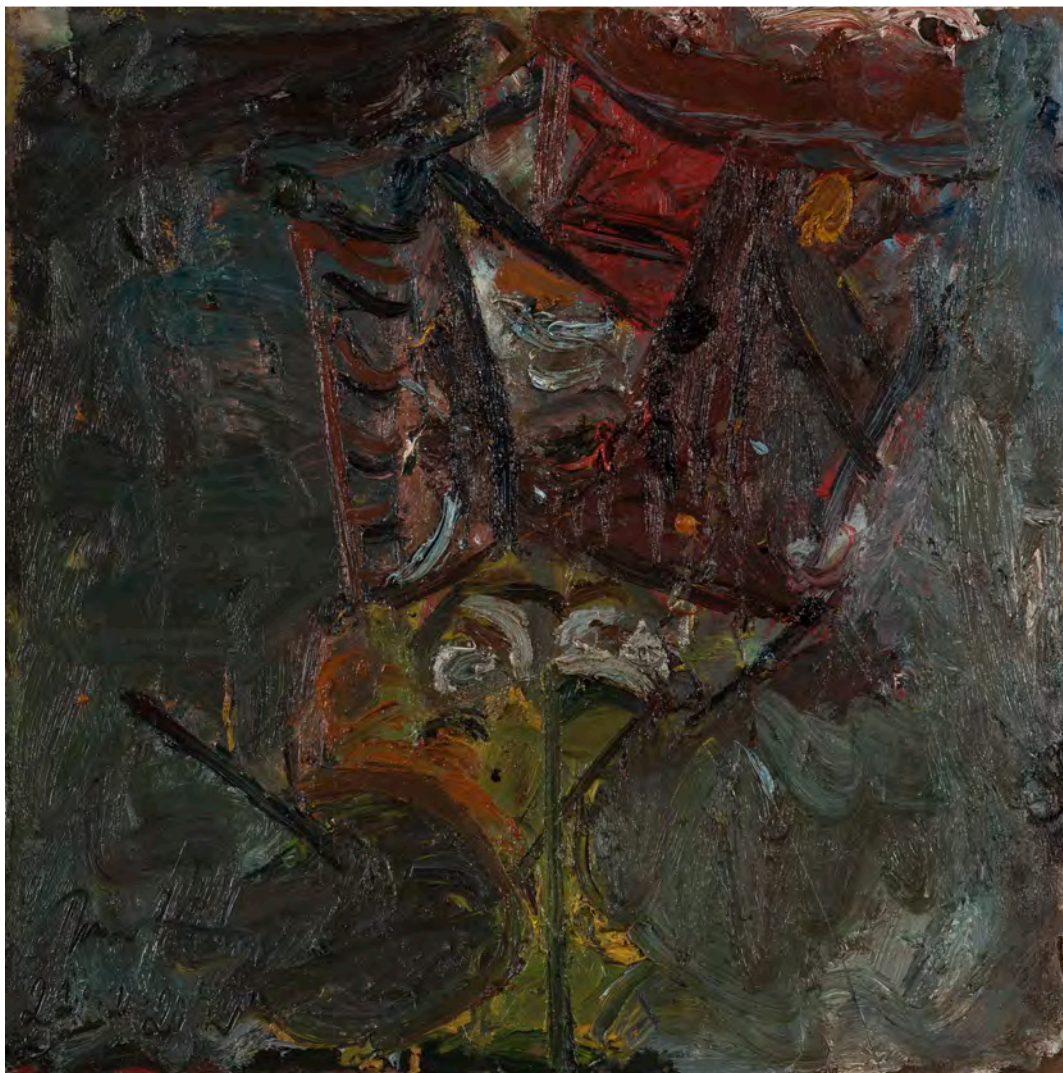
*The story of the little yellow bird*

2020

oil on linen

77 x 112 cm

NICHOLAS  
THOMPSON  
GALLERY



**JAMES DRINKWATER**

*I am a bulker*

2020

oil on hardboard

60 x 60 cm

NICHOLAS  
THOMPSON  
GALLERY



**JAMES DRINKWATER**

*This blue means I am now your raft*

2020

oil on marine ply

24 x 29 cm

NICHOLAS  
THOMPSON  
GALLERY



**JAMES DRINKWATER**

*More than paintings*

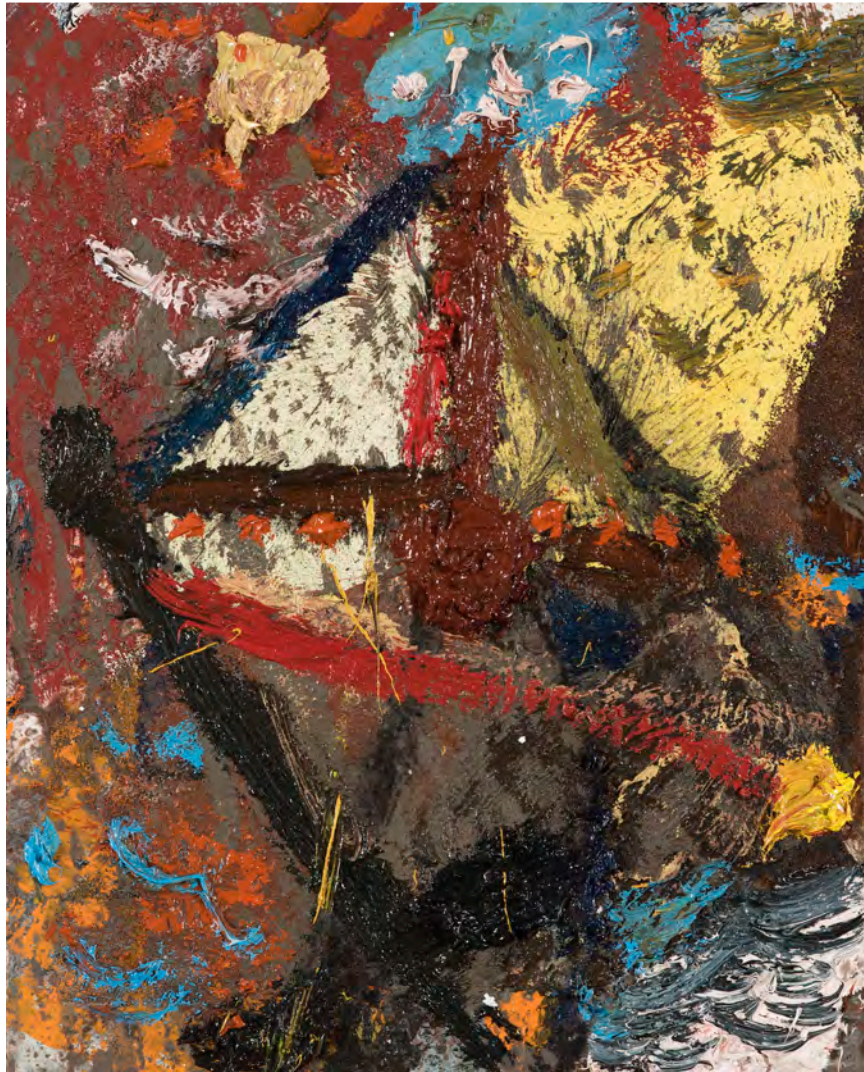
2020

oil on hardboard

21 x 29 cm



NICHOLAS  
THOMPSON  
GALLERY



**JAMES DRINKWATER**

*Blue boy*

2020

oil on hardboard

25 x 20 cm

NICHOLAS  
THOMPSON  
GALLERY



**JAMES DRINKWATER**

*Nightwalk*

2020

oil on hardboard

20 x 16 cm

NICHOLAS  
THOMPSON  
GALLERY



**JAMES DRINKWATER**

*Boxer 2*

2019

bronze, ed 12

28.5 x 13 x 9 cm

NICHOLAS  
THOMPSON  
GALLERY



**JAMES DRINKWATER**

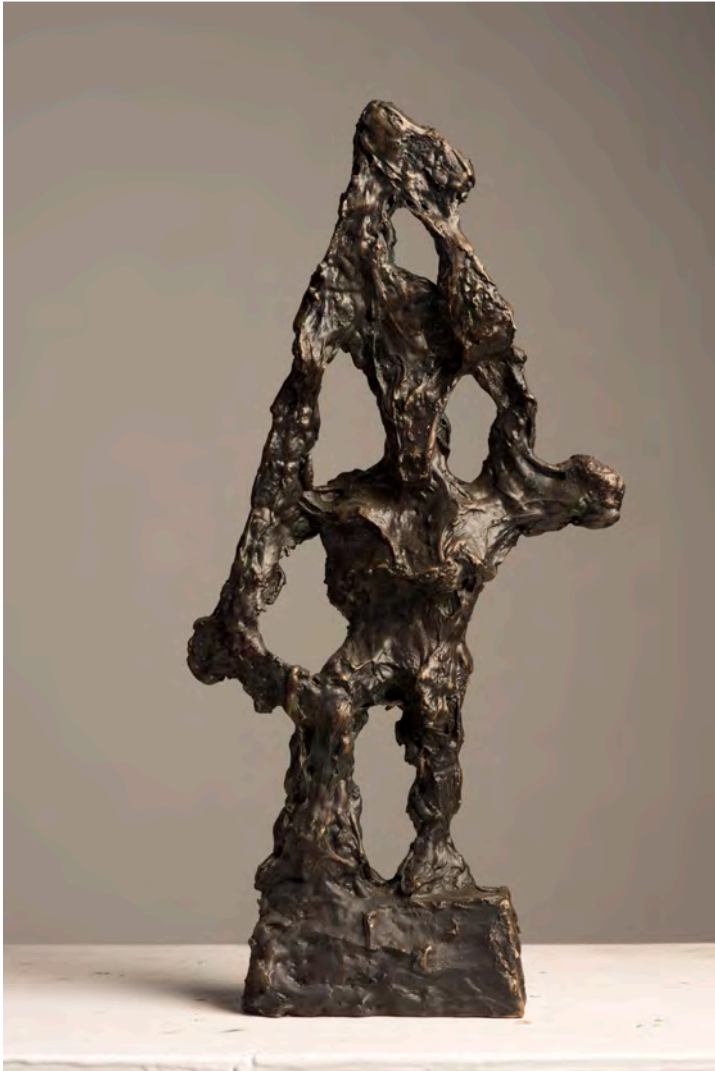
*Boxer 1*

2019

bronze, ed 12

30 x 20 x 8 cm

NICHOLAS  
THOMPSON  
GALLERY



**JAMES DRINKWATER**

*Boxer 3*

2019

bronze, ed 12

33.5 x 16.5 x 7 cm

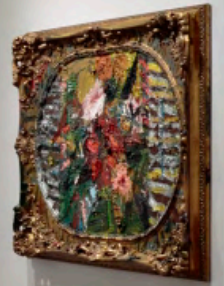
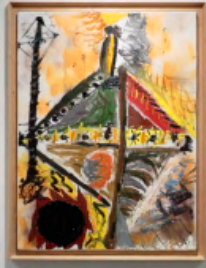
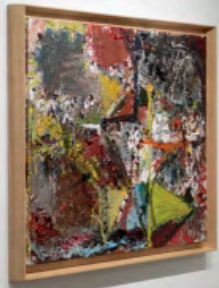


**JAMES DRINKWATER**  
I LOVE YOU MORE THAN PAINTINGS



JAMES DRINKWATER  
I LOVE YOU MORE THAN PLAYING

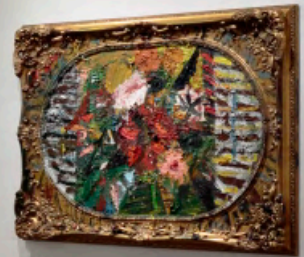
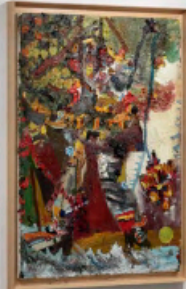
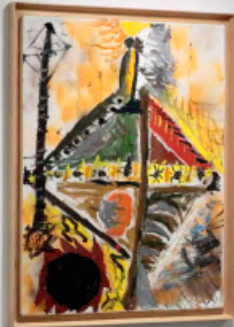


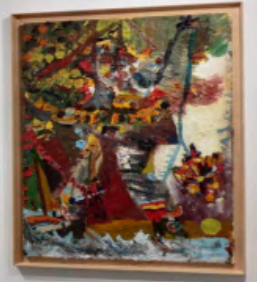
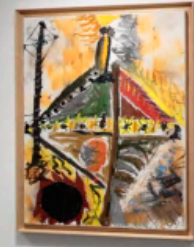
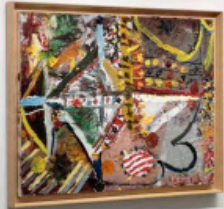
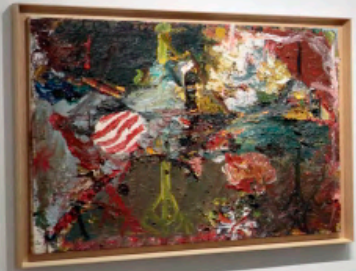


















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