



# Twenty

# A magical number

*The Mexican painting series by Salazar*

**Tonalpohalli: The Count of Fate and  
Convergence: 2002**

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## Introduction to Tonalpohalli: The Count of Fate

Twenty is a magical number in Mexico, as are seven, thirteen and fifty-two. They relate to a system of distinct calendars and almanacs used during the Maya civilization in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica. The Maya 'calendric system' dates back to the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE. The calendars speak about other Mesoamerica civilizations as well: Zapotec, Olmec and later Mixtec and Aztec calendars. The calendar did not originate with the Mayans, but as a more sophisticated early civilization in Mesoamerica they refined it significantly. The Olmec tribes, for example, left no written documents.

In my artwork I have related closely to the Aztec history and culture, as I live in central Mexico and the Mayan civilization and sphere of influence was in the Yucatan and other southern regions of Central America. I simply appropriated the "Count of Days or Fate" calendar system in which Tonalpohalli contain 260 days, not 365 as in the agricultural calendar, as an artistic license, enabling me to complete a series of 20 diptychs: that I titled, "The Count of Fate." It seems that 365 and 260 days fit into the 52-year period which the Aztecs considered what they termed their "long count of time."

"The long count," it has been reported, was based upon the number of elapsed days since a mythological starting point. Those interested in more precise information on the "long count" than is discussed in this brief introduction to the images in this book, may research any number of available scholarly publications on the subject. There are many available sources on Google®, or Wikipedia®.

At this time in 2008, considerable interest abounds in what is known as the "End of the Fifth Sun." I have been giving some consideration to this phenomenon in my artwork by initiating a series of paintings entitled; "The End of the Fifth Sun."



Figure 1 Title piece for "The End of the Fifth Sun"

A growing number of “new age” experts claim that according to the Maya calendar the 'fifth sun' is to end on the date of 21 December 2012. According to this prediction therefore, the world will end on that date. The first forecast by José Argüelles stated this prediction, but various Mayan culture scholars dispute this claim.

I have been following the discussions on the 'fifth sun' in a number of Websites but they have not led me toward any conclusions. Scientific data moreover, also does not support the proclaimed Mayan calendar's end of the world. My interest is far more limited. For example, the number “twenty” was important to people of Central America. This number represents the number of fingers and toes on a human being. In the Náhuatl language 'twenty' is descriptive of a whole person. Though Classical Náhuatl the extinct ancient language used by the Aztec Empire and recorded in mysterious glyphs the best-known form of the language to outsiders, modern Náhuatl is still very much a living language, with a dozen dialects spoken by more than two million indigenous Mexicans.

My diptychs display a head image as well as a land image: first the head (left) then the land (right). This series was exhibited comprising part of my *10 Year Retrospective* at the Diego Rivera Museum in Guanajuato, Mexico in 1999.

The series was prompted in part from some of the historical data I had gathered on Mexico, from research as well as from visits to museums on the geographical makeup and revolutionary history of the nation. Considering the facts that 15% of the land was arable; 25% of the land forested; (60% of the population of mixed Spanish and indigenous decent and 30% of purely indigenous ancestry; and 10% of European decent); I determined that Mexico and its rapidly expanding population remembers and laments the tens of thousands of hectares of land it lost to the United States, (that represents some 12% of the total area of the current territory of the United States); and it is a raw wound, never healing and ever present. This promotes the continuation of tens of thousands of Mexicans “illegals and legals” to cross the Rio Brava del Norte in search of the “golden eagle” that America seems to offer them. This is enforced in Mexico by word-of-mouth tales from relatives who have as they say, “crossed the river,” and *made it*.

Certainly, a vastly rich cultural history presented itself to me as a “gringo” artist in Mexico. This place with its panorama of inspiration enables me to develop my own interpretation of the relationship of the Mexican to his land. It seems to me that in creating this series, the people and land cannot be separated on the one hand and on the other hand the Mexican people continually fail to realize self-actualization.

To illustrate this visually, I have tried to characterize the dichotomy in depicting the relationship of a 'head' and a 'land' image, using color as the bonding force. Each diptych major color is painted in both the head and land image. I believe this imposed color application helps to fuse the significant symbolic nature of this series. Using the magical number of “twenty” for the number of diptychs, may strengthen the imagery, as it limits and enlarges the vision of the Mexican people who always are coming to grips with the sorrow they feel over the loss of their land, as well as the realization that the political machinery has, as yet, never been able to assure most Mexicans that they will be fairly treated.

Mexico's foremost writer and critic Octavio Paz in *The Labyrinth of Solitude* wrote, “The history of Mexico is the history of a man seeking his parentage. He has been influenced at one time or another by France, Spain, the United States and the militant indigenists of his own country, and he crosses history like a jade comet, now and then giving off flashes of lighting. What is it he is pursuing in this course? He wants to go back beyond the catastrophe he suffered: he wants to be a sun again, to return to the center of that life from which he was separated one day. (Was that day the Conquest? Independence?)”

San Miguel de Allende, GTO, México, 2008



Figure 2 Uncropped Image #1 "Tonalpohalli"

# The Count of Fate Tonalpohalli

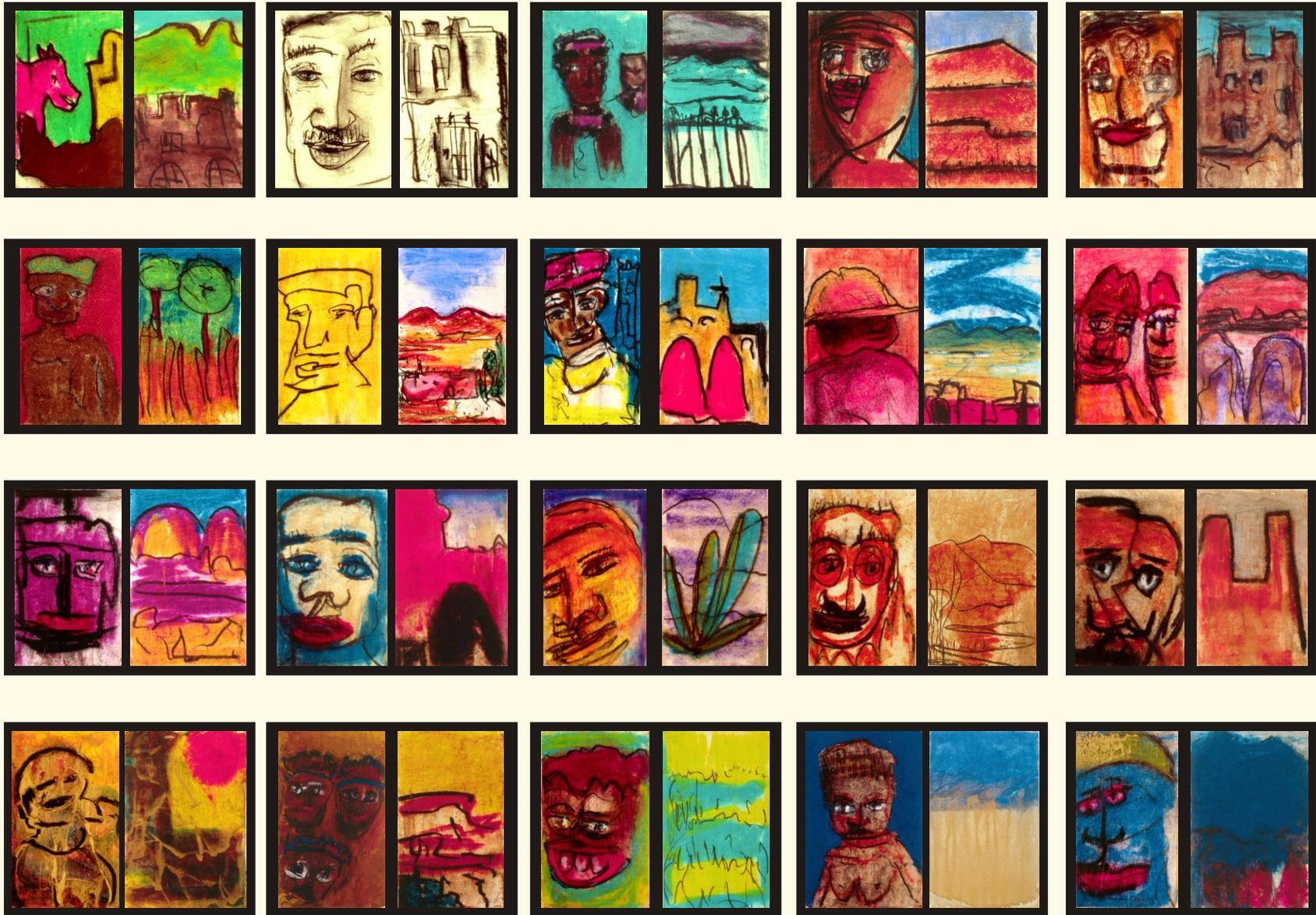


FIGURE 3

# Tonalpohalli: The Count of Fate



Figure 4 "Image 1"



Figure 5 "Image 2"



Figure 6 “Image 3”

## Introduction to Convergence: 2002

In 2002, I created the Convergence series of twenty images in San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato, México. It is a numbered series with no titles: 50" X 24" paper size and 46" X 20" image size. All are done on Stonehenge paper with *chapapote* (tar) and oil pastels, with spray enamels used in some of the images. These vertical images were done after I completed the series: Roland's Friends 2002: Aztec Deities. These too are vertical, of the same size and they too utilize *chapapote*.

I would hope that I have not misnamed this as Convergence: *meaning a coming together such an error would disappoint, even depress me.* The Year 2002 was a 'signature year' for me, and the Aztec Deities and Convergence series might be shown as one exhibition: "2002 A Signature Year." However, I will most likely show Convergence: 2002 as a single show.

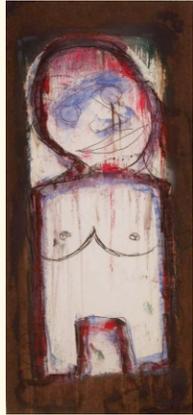
Why did I call this exhibition Convergence? Why Twenty Images?

Both questions are difficult to answer, as deciphering it could become an academic exercise. As I often work in series, I am not surprised that this body of work is also a numbered series.

Twenty is a magical number in Mexican mythology, as are fifty-two, thirteen and seven. I tried dealing with 'twenty' in another set of work, called "The Count of Fate." The number returned to me as I began the Convergence series. Historically, twenty was important to many Central American cultures. This is the number of fingers and toes on a human being, and in the Indian language the number "twenty" is descriptive of a person, a complete person.

In this work for Convergence I still find much derivation from Mexican mythology. Some images are abstract, gestures with the bare hint of a figurative representation. Other images are clearly figurative abstract, and while the Count of Fate series was twenty diptychs, these are single imprints. They appear, when shown as a group of twenty, to be concerned with communion and the art thereof.

The paintings were not carried out as individual works. To be sure, one can hang one on a wall, or two or even more. They can stand alone, with no necessity for support. But the completion of all twenty was an act I had to accomplish in order to make "me" a *complete person*. In the Aztec calendar, 'twenty' is magical and Convergence represents the complete person. The artist: **Salazar**.



**Figure 26 Convergence: 2002**

What about the *chapapote* medium I use in this series? It is a form of asphalt found in Mexico the Antilles and Venezuela. The use of the word “*chapapote*” became commonplace dating back to November 12<sup>th</sup> 2002, when the tanker *Prestige* sank off the Galician coast. The Spanish government failed to take suitable corrective action as this vessel foundered off the coast; consequently, the dangerous 50,000 tons of crude oil emptied at sea and wracked serious damage to the coast, wildlife and the fishing industry of Spain.

But why am I using *chapapote* (tar) in my paintings? And when did it start? Around 1997 I began experimenting with *chapapote* (let's call it “chap”); it is used as a sealer on unglazed tile floors in colonial areas of Mexico such as San Miguel de Allende.

On floors, contractors apply chap to the unglazed tiles; they also use it on the pine beams for an antique look. The problem with floors, I determined, is that after repeated washes, especially with strong detergent by the housekeeper, the finish is soon removed. I found that, since chap is a petrol-chemical I could add Sal-Zar (my Mixed Media Medium™) to the chap, which enabled it to withstand repeated washes. To create the chap mix for floors I add white gas, which can be heated with the chap pieces, and some beeswax and for color, should one wish, some vermilion oil paint. Today some contractors only use the white gas, no heating, no wax, and after the chap has dried in the tiles, say within three days' time, they apply a final coat of polyurethane. I'm not sure of the poly application: said to last five years but what happens then? Strip off the poly? Reapply the chap? Not clear! I prefer to mix the varnish base of Sal-Zar™ with the chap.

Thus I happened onto chap as I mixed it, finding it can be a coating and used in my paintings, on paper and primed Masonite. As far as paper is concerned, I have exclusively used Stonehenge® without any primer. In some instances I have used an oil gesso on the paper. When the gesso is used then the saturation level in the paper is severely reduced and the visual appearance becomes altered, as when one applies the chap directly to paper.

I have used Sal-Zar directly onto Stonehenge paper, and worked the chap into the paper with Sal-Zar applied first, or later on top of the chap. If this seems too complicated, see my Website: [www.salazargallery.com](http://www.salazargallery.com) for my instruction on how to use chap to get a real sense of how to apply it and the results. A concluding thought: the use of oil pastels with chap is very exciting and has done me a great service in creating unique images. I have also found that chap with Sal-Zar and spray enamels works well. After completion, if desired, the entire work may be coated with a suitable varnish.

Is this method permanent? That's a good question and I can't answer it! In some paintings I have used chap on canvas. I have found that Stonehenge™ paper and hardboard, such as Ampersand™ appears to work and it is as permanent as I can make it. The subject will have to be explored by conservators.

I have sometimes felt I may have fallen into a 'tar pit.' For I find that *chapapote* has so many unique qualities and can be applied on top of acrylics, that I fear I am getting to be a tar baby and can't free myself of its dependency in my art. Well, that's another story!

But the fact remains, *chapapote* from the earth of Mexico, and its brown tone appearance in my paintings, speaks of Mexico: it serves well to illustrate both the land and its people. It permits me to bring more attention to our worldwide chemical dependency, especially on oil and its pollution. Now that '*chapapote*' has become a household word due to the sinking of the tanker *Prestige* (some irony in that name, to be sure), the material stands as a symbol of this disturbing global dependence upon petroleum.

San Miguel de Allende, GTO, México 2008

# Convergence 2002

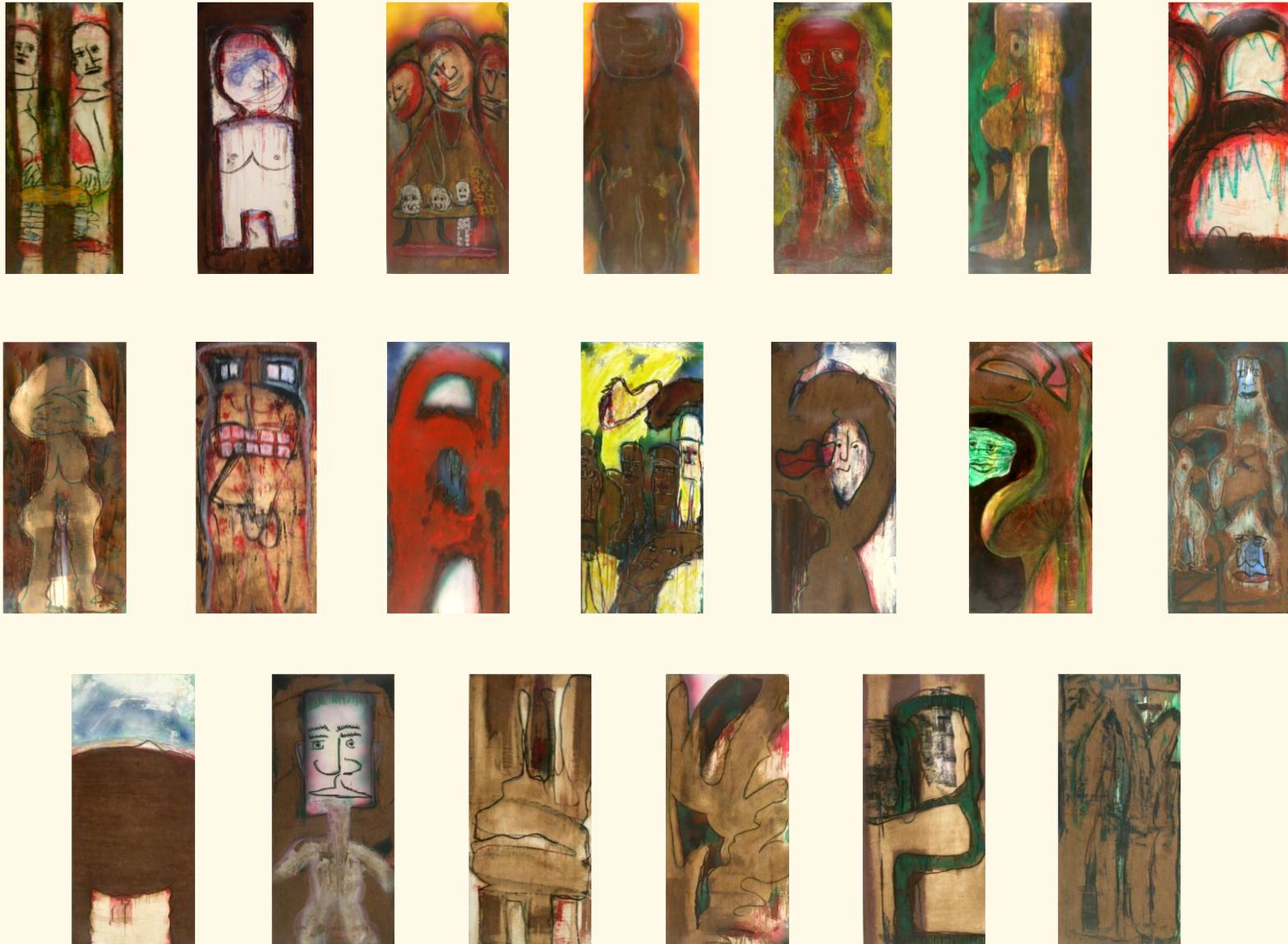


Figure 24

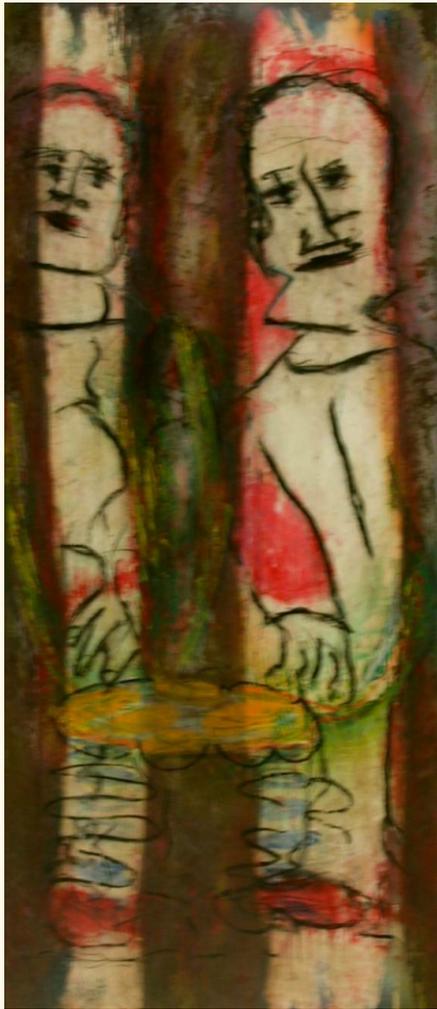


Figure 25



Figure 26



Figure 27



Figure 28



Figure 39

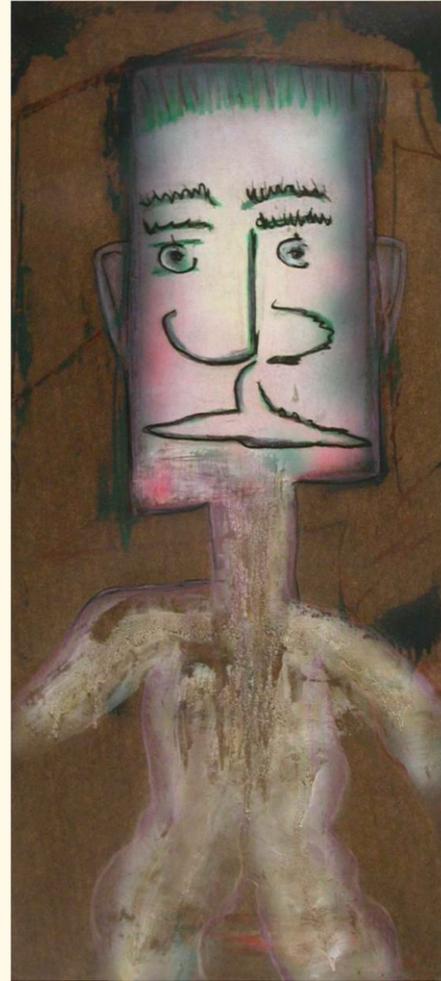


Figure 40



Figure 41



Figure 42

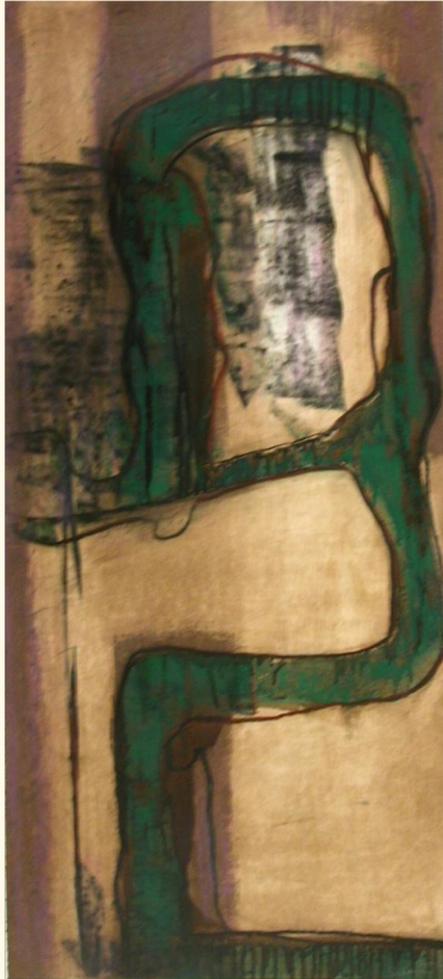


Figure 43

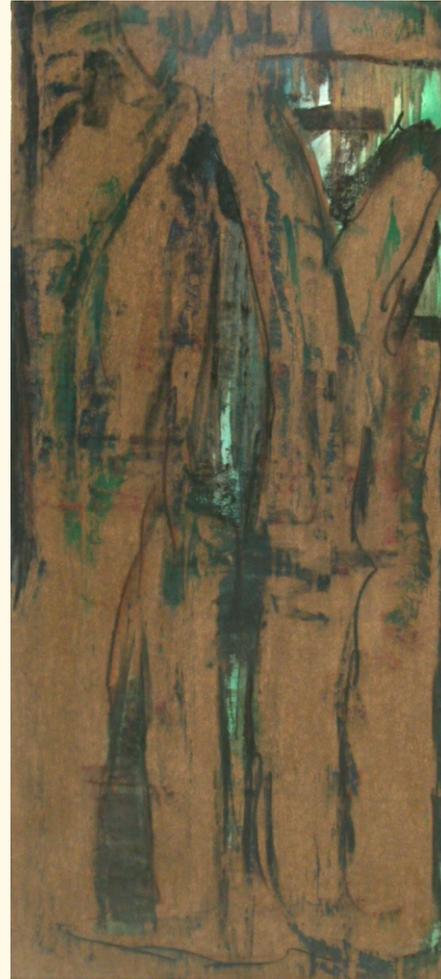


Figure 44

## Afterword on E-art books from Ramblin/Rose Publications

As a visual artist I face the well-known problem both of how to get to show my art in proper venues and also how to communicate my creative concerns. I have enjoyed some success in showing my work, but nothing like that of many contemporaries. I write about my work, which largely created in series, and afterward I display the images alongside the written material on my Website: [www.salazargallery.com](http://www.salazargallery.com). I recently found another way to show my art and to communicate the stories behind the images: I am publishing my work as E-art books (electronic books). Far from a new concept, electronic publishing is an increasingly an important medium in which books may be transmitted and read. Art books are notoriously difficult to get published, and even if one self publishes, the cost and problems of marketing become far more difficult than other POD books.

To accomplish my mission of “show & tell art” I format the E-book using Corel Draw™. After approval of the book by way of format, graphic design, color and number of production copies, I then use Acrobat™ to produce a PDF file: the most common acceptable file transfer method employed for Internet transmission of documents and any other printed matter. I enable the PDF file on my Website, as a *free* download but secured as a “read only” file; locked from print and alteration by the person who downloads the PDF file. The download explains that if you want to *print* the book your self you must pay a small fee. This fee is collected on PayPal™, Google Checkout™; PayloadZ™, which then accomplishes the download. If the buyer prefers to have a full color printed book, spiral bound with many pages suitable for framing, or gifts, they pay another fee and the book is sent from the publisher to the person placing the order.

Up until now, I haven't any idea how this method will be received. E-books are sometimes free and at other times charges are required. There are many choices on the Internet: specific sites where one can get books to be downloaded. With the new hardware offered by Amazon, (Amazon's Kindle™) one can read the e-books offered on any sort of handheld device.

My new way of communicating is certainly no 'breakthrough' in publishing. It is merely one way the 'little' folks in the market place may attempt to reach an audience. It would be nice if it were successful and economically rewarding! But as with the process of creating artistic images, the joy is in the mere doing, rather than in their marketing.

Artists have a voice, yet we often refrain from expressing how our work has been completed and what it means to them in the doing. We often hang back, saying: “I do the images, but it's up to you to express what they mean.” True enough! But this is an age when communication using both sides of the brain might assist us better than casting aside one side, favoring only the other.

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