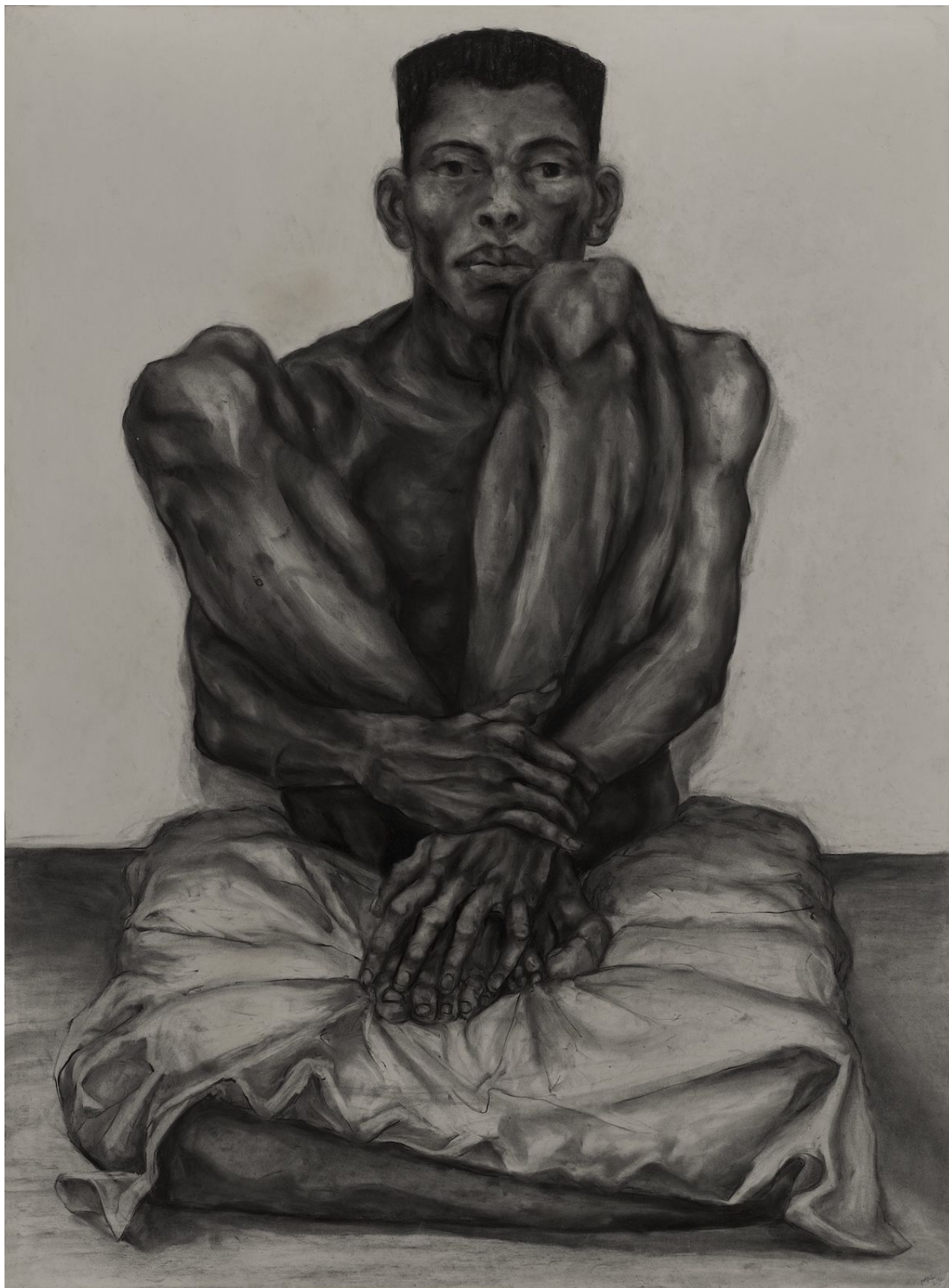


Exploring Human Presence: Mal Fostock's UK Debut INCLUSION

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Best known for his figurative depictions, Mal Fostock is a multidisciplinary artist of subtle intensity and rare emotional sensitivity. Driven by an abiding inquisitiveness, Fostock creates works that radiate intimacy, profundity, and introspection, probing the protean complexity of the human form and experience.

Seamlessly moving across different mediums, Mal Fostock sees art-making as a polyphonic, revelatory event akin to life itself, one that centres on the mystery and alterity of the Other. It is only through the encounter with the Other that meaning emerges and creation is finally accomplished. Each engagement, be it via portraiture, photography, sculpture, or other media, becomes an occasion for the artist to attend to the uniqueness and significance of another, translating the unrepeatable presence of his sitters into artworks of striking affective resonance.

Fostock graduated from Wimbledon College of Art in 1992, and subsequently went on to refine his craft at the esteemed New York Studio School of Drawing, Painting, and Sculpture. During these formative years, he benefited from the guidance of established figures in the contemporary art landscape – including Francesco Clemente, Stanisław Frenkiel, and Adi Da Samraj – whose visions and mentorship left an enduring imprint on his artistic process.

Timed to coincide with Frieze week, an upcoming exhibition – the first in the UK for Fostock – at Mall Galleries, London, is set to reveal a fresh prospective on the multifarious work of the artist. The show, titled *INCLUSION* and curated by Fostock himself, will bring together works spanning print, painting, and sculpture, as well as a selection of pieces created in collaboration with his mother, renowned British-Lebanese sculptor Bushra Fakhoury. *INCLUSION* will be running concurrently with *TRANSMUTE*, a survey of Fakhoury's sculptural practice, presented alongside collaborative photographic works produced with Mal Fostock.

1883 Arts Editor reached out to Fostock to discuss his painting practice and approach to art-making, and to enquire about the role intuition plays in his oeuvre.



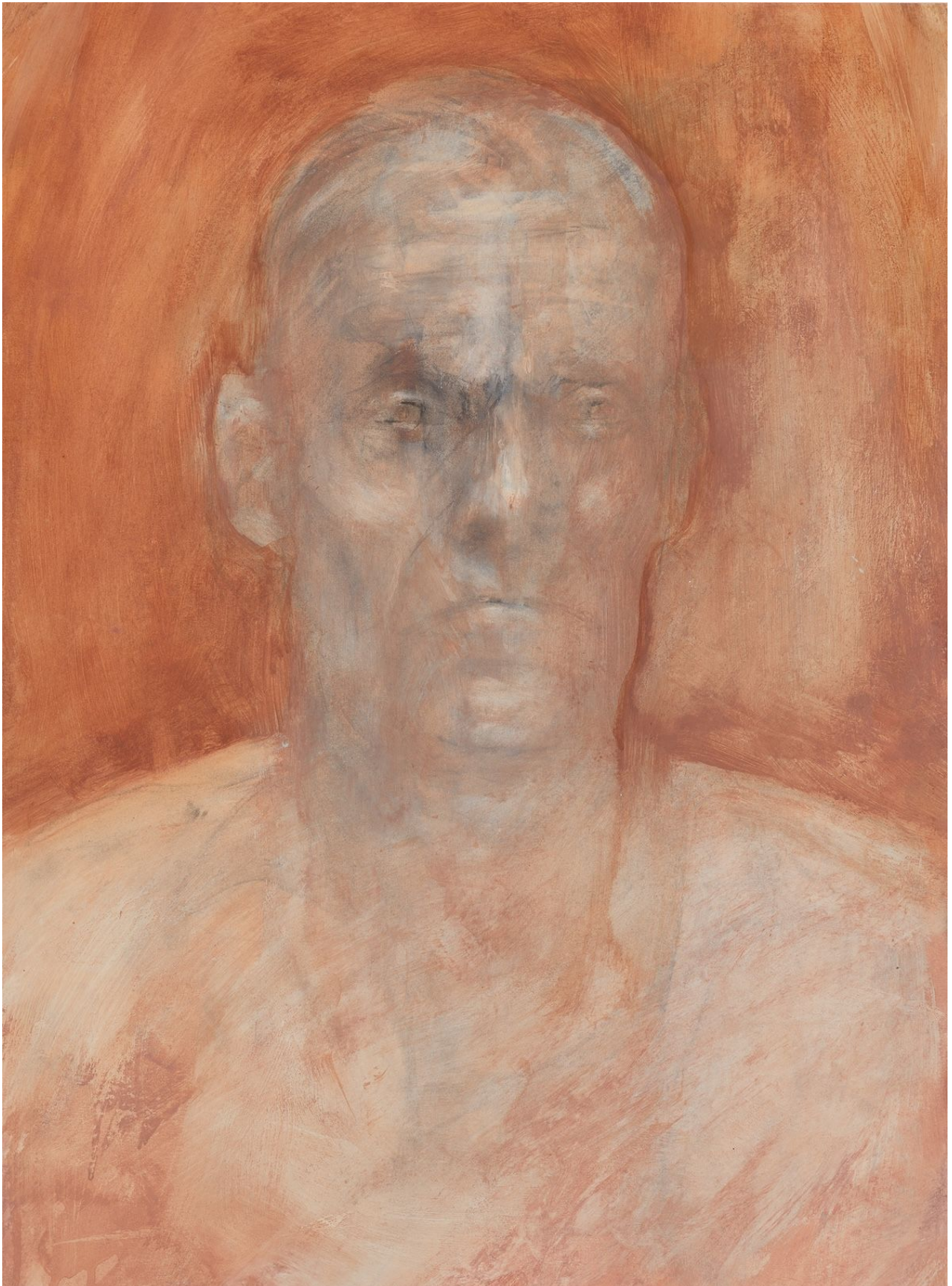
Mal Fostock, Reluctant Model

Hello Mr Fostock, thank you for finding time for 1883 Magazine. I would like to ask you about *Reluctant Model* (2012). I find the title of the work amusingly oxymoronic, if you will. If the painting could speak, what story would it tell?

Thank you for your interest and taking the time to ask such refreshing questions.

Regarding The Reluctant Model, the model himself came up with the title. He was sitting for me one afternoon in the quiet of the studio. He worked both on the Underground and as a bricklayer. At the same time, he aspired to be a comedy writer. He told me he was initially very reluctant to take on this commitment. He knew it would require sustained effort on his part.

However, once he decided to model for me, I found him very reliable. He never got bored, always engaged in his inner world as a writer. This made my time with him very relaxed and enjoyable. In the portrait, I tried to capture with the use of paint his more rugged qualities and at the same time tried to express his more softer side, reflecting his private thoughts.



Mal Fostock, Gideon

Reluctant Model has an almost sculptural quality to it. Can you tell us about the technique you used for this painting?

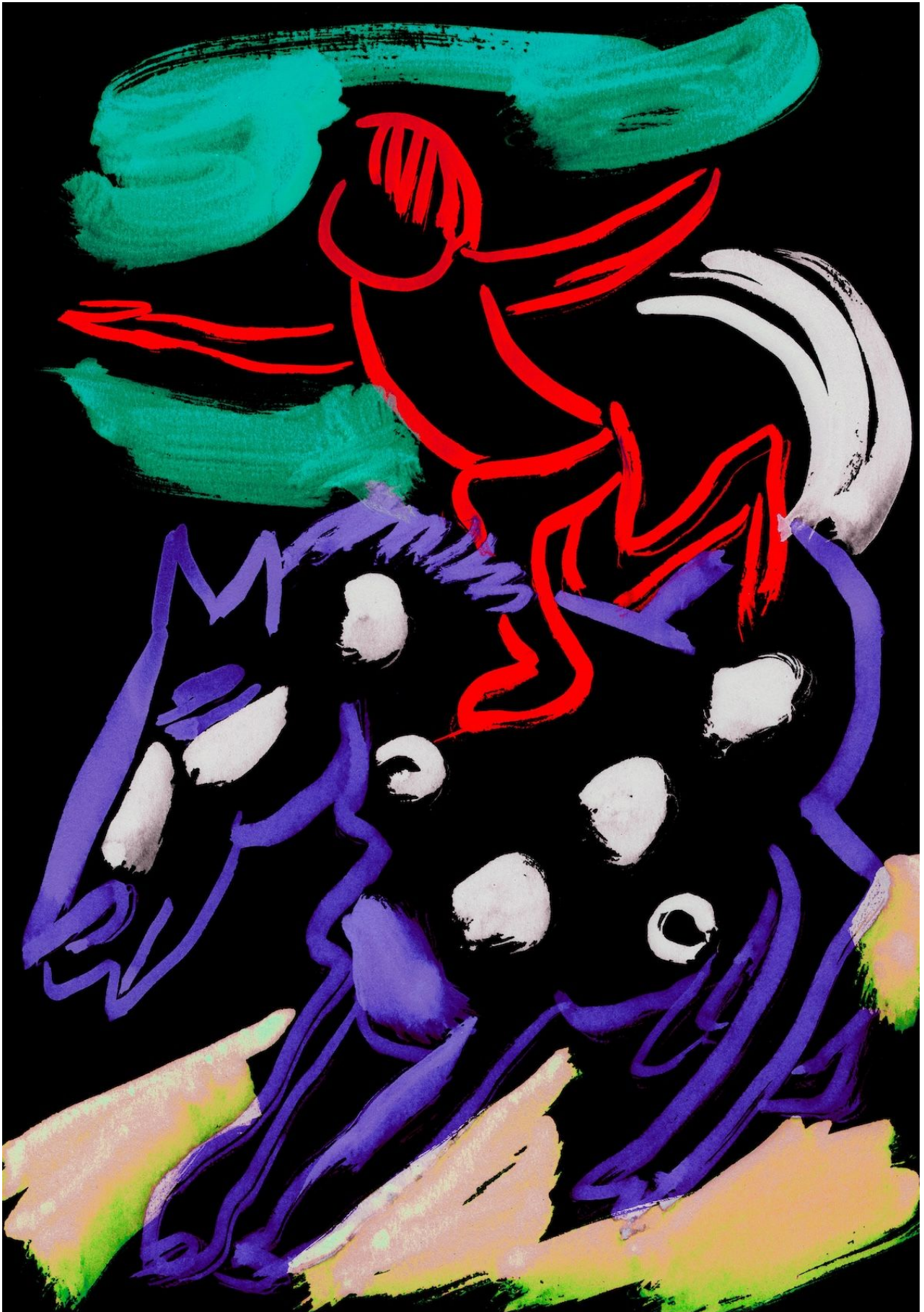
After about five or so sittings, this painting already had a character of its own, and the canvas was already covered with a thin layer of paint. The effect is visually two-dimensional at this stage. I continue painting and building up layers slowly for two reasons. One reason is the very sensual quality of applying a thicker, more robust brush mark with the brush. As the painting develops, it becomes interesting to see how these assertive marks with thicker paint relate to each other.

The other reason is to do with the fact that there's an actual person sitting in front of me. And that person has so many different qualities. I continue painting with the intention that hopefully the painting will be able to mirror the presence of that person. One aspect being their obvious physicality, which relates to the sculptural qualities.

What are the special techniques you use for creating specific textures and effects?

Initially, I start the painting with thin layers of oil paint diluted with pure gum turpentine. As the paint starts to build slightly, one adds oil or an oil medium to the paint. That way, when the paint dries it is more robust and less brittle and prone to cracking over time. I use cremnitz white. Its heavy lead content makes it very robust and it also mixes very beautifully with other colours. Michael Harding has a range of excellent oil paints and has lead white alternatives.

I find it daring to put a brush mark loaded with thick paint onto the canvas when I'm trying to represent something specific that I'm looking at. As a painter, I am always hoping for brush marks to relate to each other dynamically. I want them to give off a burst of energy. This somehow connects to free energy and free feeling.



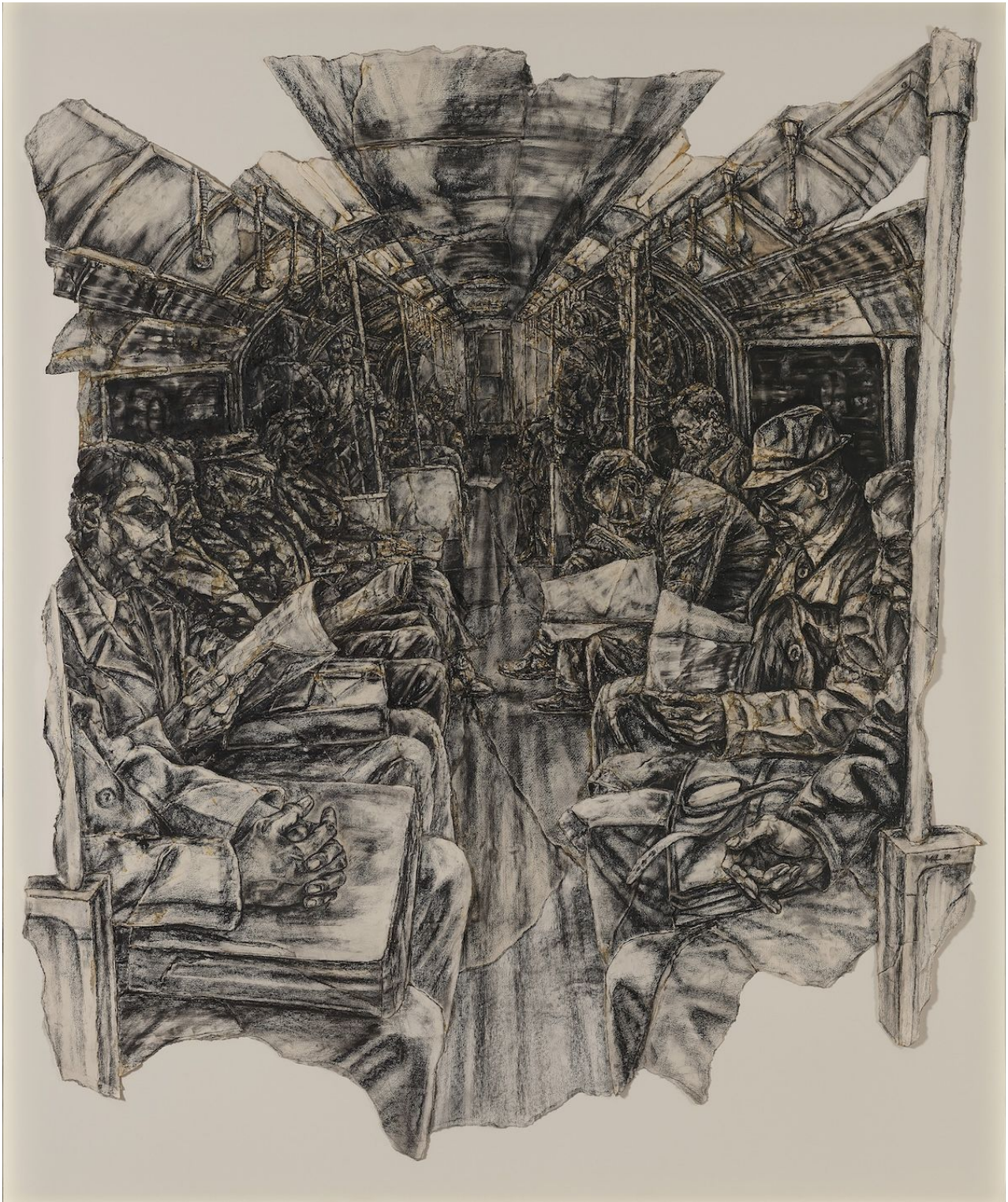
Mal Fostock, Free Spirit

How do you create the hazy, misty effect in paintings such as *Gideon* (1991)?

Another way of painting that I began to explore with Gideon and would like to one day continue to develop is painting with thin layers of paint. The thrill in this case comes from how these thin layers of paint relate to each other to create forms. Whether painting with thick paint or thin, the focus is always on the model and not primarily on the paint effects. The paint effects occur naturally only when I focus my gaze primarily on the model.

How do you control the opacity and transparency to enhance its soft, diffuse light?

I'm always aware of feeling into the unity that holds all the elements of the painting together. Any soft diffuse light that may emanate from the painting comes more from being aware in my feeling of this underlying unity. Any techniques are always secondary and are simply from developing the paint layers over a course of time.



Mal Fostock, *Train*

I would like to ask you about *Free Spirit* (2006) now. The work reflects a veer to a more succinct, almost abstract style. What was your approach to creating this artwork?

I've always been moved by Zen Art and the idea that a single brush mark can convey Freedom. That's why I called this piece *Free Spirit*. My intention with the work is to convey a burst of energy. Free energy reflects joy, happiness, a quality that is free of contracted states of mind and body.

From the classic Indian Sanskrit text The Panchadashi, there's a quote that I love that comes to mind. "All created things are born of joy. Even the elements emerge from, live out their entire lives in, and in the end merge back into that original joy".

Do you find one style informs the other? Or do they exist as separate entities, so to speak, in your work?

Mark making is central to my work. Two marks overlapping each other in some way is like creating a spark from one strike of two bits of flint. So I'm always interested in the abstract mark making. However, I find it more challenging to create those abstract marks while they still relate somehow to something that is not abstract. It's like relating what is in front of me and at the same time feeling what is beyond.



Mal Fostock, Study of a Man (Unfinished)

I wonder, what role does intuition have in your working process?

While I'm working, I always want to be in a place where I'm working intuitively. I don't find I negate conscious reasoning while working intuitively. In fact, I find there is an intelligence that is sensed instinctively when I'm fully engaged in what I'm doing; when I am feeling, breathing and whole-bodily being present with all my senses.

How do you balance intentionality with intuitiveness?

I am very aware of what I need to do to prepare myself before working. This helps the creative process unfold as freely as possible. On days when I haven't prepared, the process feels literally impossible. It becomes difficult and draining. There is a lot of swearing happening in the studio on those days. So I really try to avoid being in that situation.

I'm more aware of this when doing an oil painting as I need to be completely consistent in my mind from one day to the other. One day off could potentially ruin months of work.

And how do you approach experimenting with new techniques and ideas?

I love exploring things and pushing techniques to their limits. There are so many ways of doing things. It's just a matter of finding what suits my temperament at any time.



Mal Fostock, Hôtel Régina

Mal Fostock's exhibition INCLUSION will be at Mall Galleries, West Gallery, London SW1Y 5AS from 7th-11th October 2025. For more info visit mallgalleries.org.uk

For more info about Mal Fostock visit malfostock.com

Interview [Jacopo Nuvolari](#)

Top Image Credit

Mal Fostock, Crouching