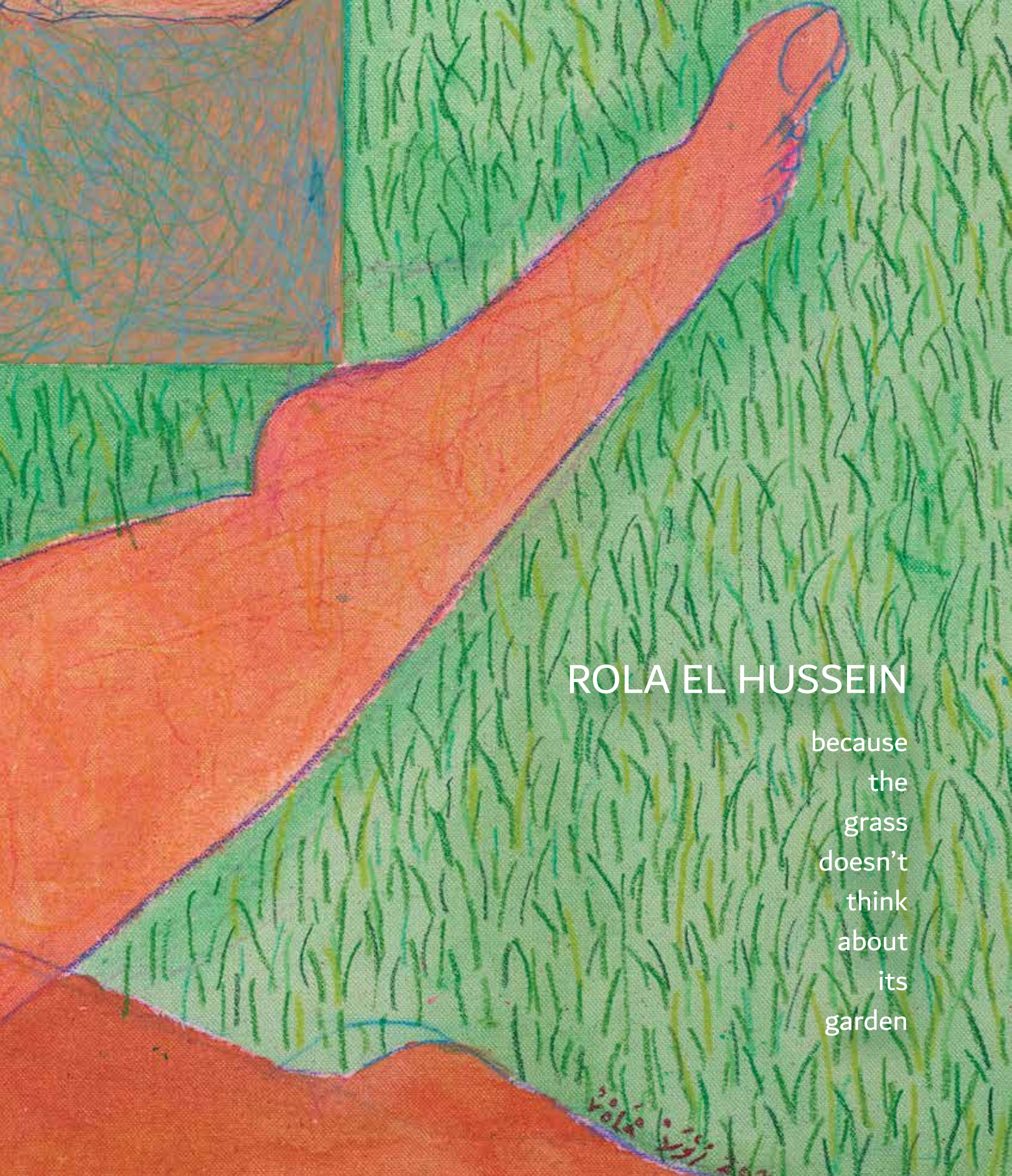


An abstract painting featuring a large, stylized foot in shades of orange and red, positioned diagonally across the frame. The foot is set against a background of green grass, depicted with dense, vertical, textured strokes. In the upper left corner, there is a rectangular area with a mottled orange and blue texture. At the bottom right, there is a small, handwritten signature in Arabic script. The overall style is expressive and textured, characteristic of contemporary art.

ROLA EL HUSSEIN

because
the
grass
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think
about
its
garden

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because the grass doesn't think about its garden

There is a straightforward quality to the work of Rola El Hussein; bright, colour-pop days of unabashed eroticism and plants, feet and watermelon, set against the possibility that this simple, colourful life is somehow happening outside our apparent control, acting on instinct, like the grass alluded to in the exhibition title.

In the last year El Hussein has moved from the small scale to the large, from the solitude of an everyday life of coffee cups, trees and discarded strappy sandals, to an sensual garden union, a love story lived outside. It is her garden, we imagine, under her own sky.

*Something is underneath,
a foot is being laced into a transparent shoe,
the layers of a story are playfully constructed.*

Two tongues twist together. This should be a portrait of sensual play, yet somehow it is not. These tongues are without mouths, faces, detached from themselves in a finding of each other. In fact, this artist seems most attracted to the interplay of objects, the way a tongue can look as it moves against another, more than she wants to express the *feeling* of contact, intimacy, desire.

The eye is detached, and even the colours are removed from the close reality that is depicted.

*A tongue is wrapped around an object, something orange
above are eyes, disfigured by blue sky.*

*Again, there is the feeling of the tongue
something is watching something from somewhere.*

The way one tongue looks as it feels another

There is this distance, a confusion of distance and intimacy, formality in the face of closeness.

While the stories might tell of the most intimate of encounters, intimacy is somehow lacking. Instead, there is transparency, both in the way the work is constructed and in the scenes that are depicted.

There is a continual building of one layer over another, the feeling of simplicity achieved through this transparency, expressed most clearly through the artists' bold handling of media. The paint, for example, appears glassily stained rather than painted onto the canvas, while the subjects themselves are formed from bold, confident lines. One heavy line crosses awkwardly with another, forming a recognisable shape, while another adds anatomical embellishments that appear oddly cut and pasted. The anatomy is constructed in bits and pieces. An areola seems stuck to a breast, under a nipple, the lines of construction are clear, it is a body in parts, watched and ready to be disassembled.

The layering of canvas pieces on top of each other is one more means to explore the layering of experience. Always, there are many lines, an almost pattern forming the background of grass, sky, nature.

At times, parts of a story emerge more clearly; ice lollies dance among rain clouds, feet trample above. In some paintings the narrative is more complex still, speaking to a world outside the garden.

A pink square of a fleshy texture is garnished with a flower. Light fluffy balls of russet rest on light grasses, soft blue sky. Dark leaves fall across the scene. This work does not ask for too much analysis, but live now, it suggests, enjoy the day.

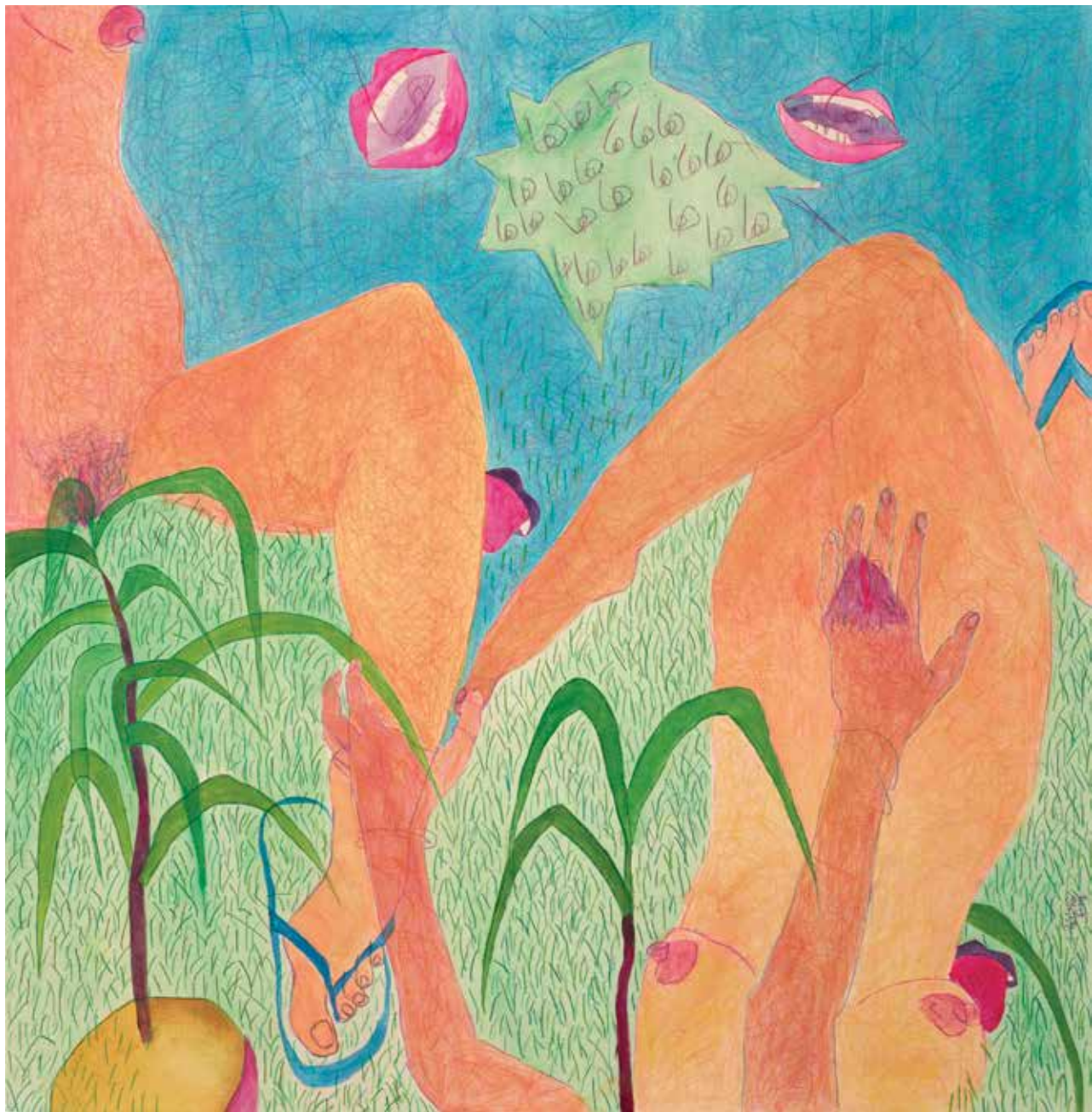
There is a painting that catches the eye. In the top right hand corner is a foot. This is not unusual, the artist has a feeling for feet; outdoors, in sandals, bare, beside sandals. Feet are important, or they are easy to see and to render. But these particular feet seem to epitomise the artists' somewhat dislocated eye, her way of depicting her own intimate life while remaining an onlooker. Look closer and one tiny group of toes are arranged quite wrongly onto the smooth edge of a foot, certainly not in the anatomically correct position. The toes here are quite separate from the foot, another bodily copy and paste, a layer waiting to be layered somewhere else. They are placed together only because that is what one should do, this is how a foot should be, but they could equally be placed somewhere else. Imagine these toes wrapped around that tongue, what shapes they could make.

This work sparks simplicity and fun, but with an acknowledgement of the limits of both. Rola's is an art of detachment that is seeking connection. And she can put these tiny toes wherever she likes.

Amy Todman
May 2024



Mirror Mirror on the Sky | Acrylic & color pencils on canvas & on craft paper | 103x113 cm | 2023



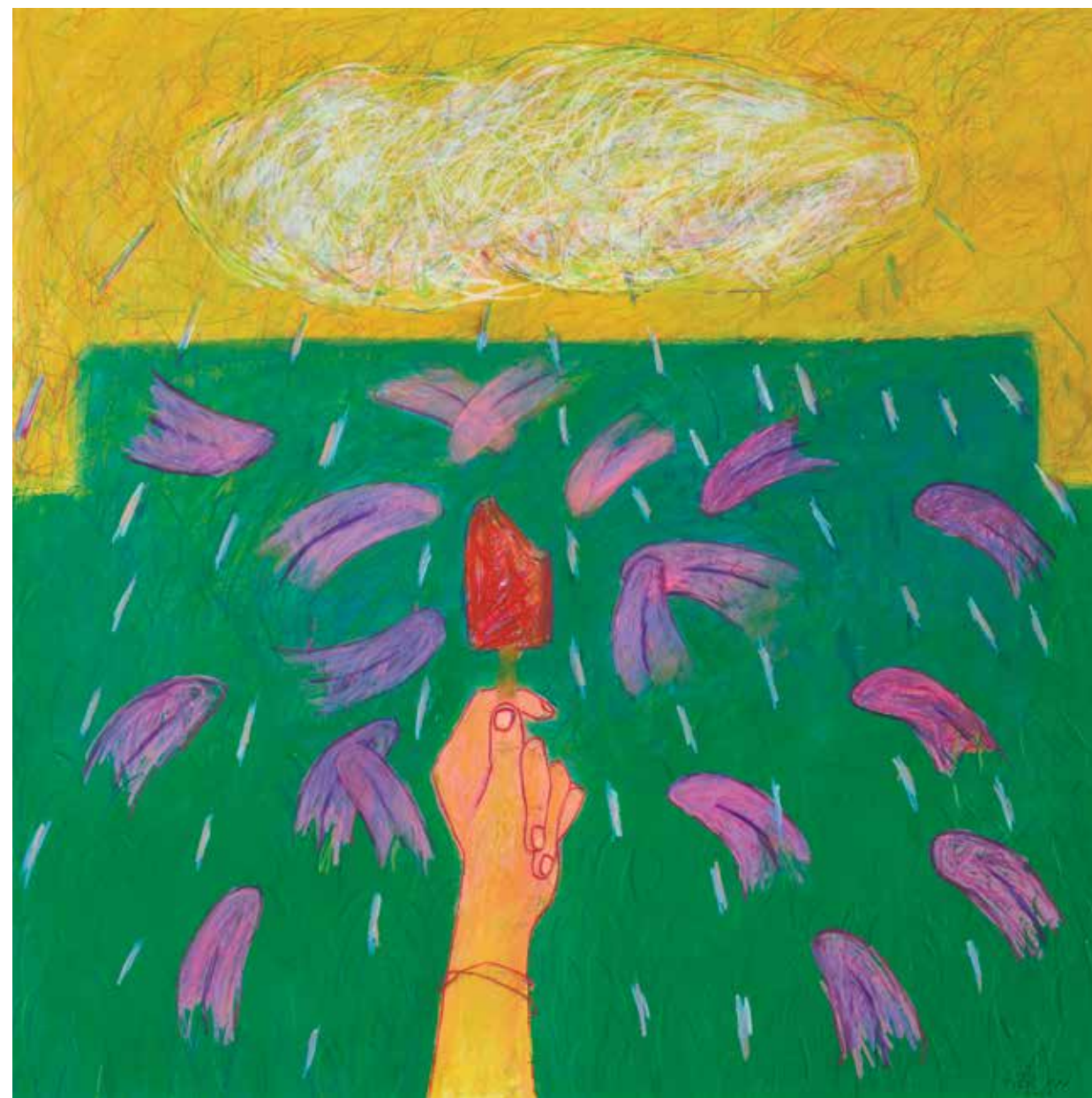
Laugh with Me | Acrylic & color pencils on canvas | 100x101 cm | 2023



Pick an Icecream before it melts | Acrylic & color pencils on canvas | 100x102.5 cm | 2024



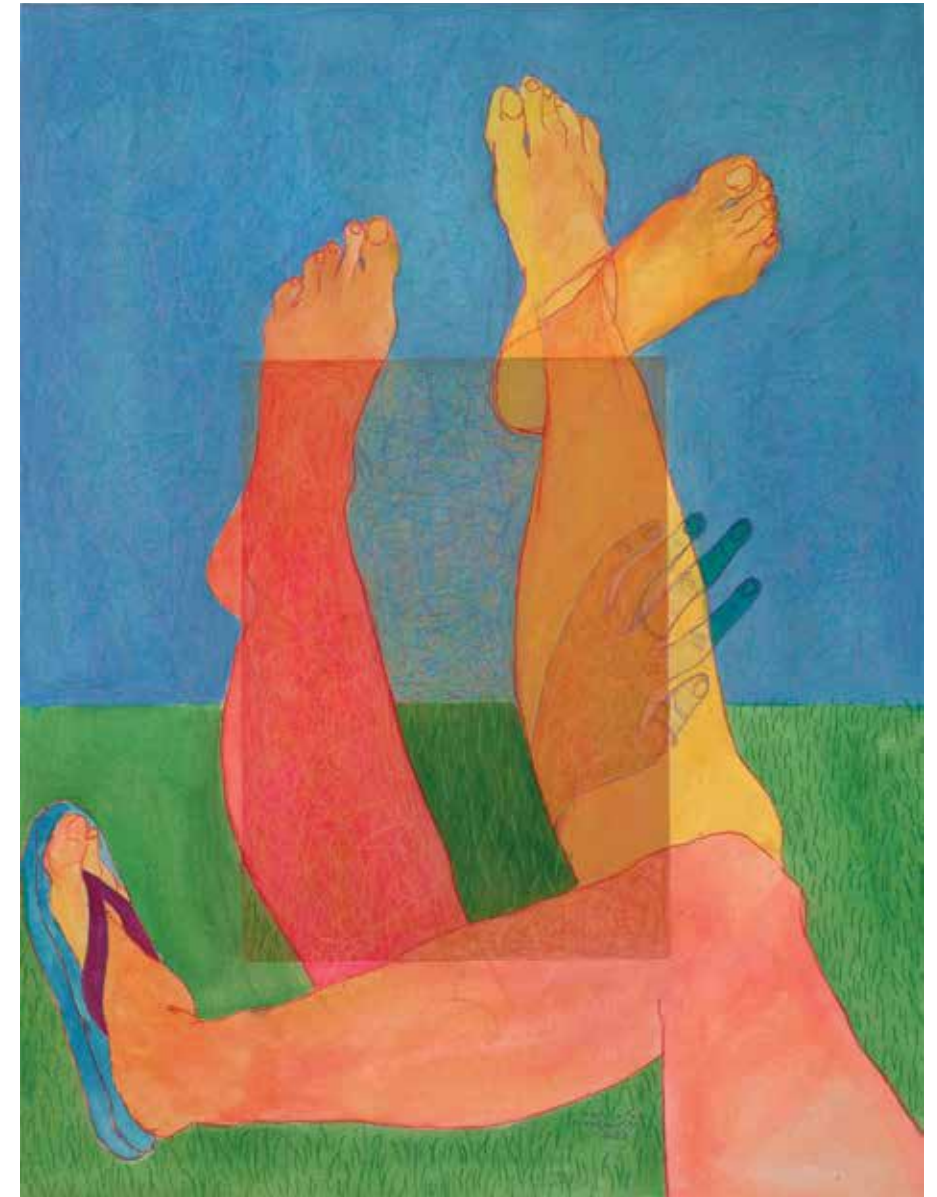
Don't Look Away | Acrylic & color pencils on canvas & craft paper | 70x60.5 cm | 2023 (left)



It's Raining on our Tongues | Acrylic & wax on paper | 70x70 cm | 2024



Joking with You | Acrylic & color pencils on canvas & craft paper | 63x84 cm | 2023



Touch my Legs | Acrylic & color pencils on canvas & craft paper | 63x84 cm | 2023



It's not Complicated | Acrylic & color pencils on canvas & craft paper | 60.5x70.5 cm | 2023 (right)



Have a Beer with Me | Acrylic & color pencils on canvas | 48x48.5 cm | 2023 (left)



Let's Try Again | Acrylic & color pencils on canvas & craft paper | 49.5x50.5 cm | 2023 (right)



Oh Yes I Like Socks | Acrylic & color pencils on canvas & craft paper | 61x64.5 cm | 2023



The Power of the Middle Finger | Acrylic & color pencils on canvas & craft paper | 61x63 cm | 2023



Follow the Instructions | Acrylic & color pencils on canvas & craft paper | 45x46.5 cm | 2023 (left)
Relaxing on the Grass | Acrylic & color pencils on canvas & craft paper | 48.5x49.5 cm | 2023 (right)

Topless on the Grass | Acrylic & color pencils on canvas | 45x46.5 cm | 2023 (left)
Warm My Feet Like This | Acrylic & color pencils on canvas & craft paper | 44.5x56 cm | 2023 (right)



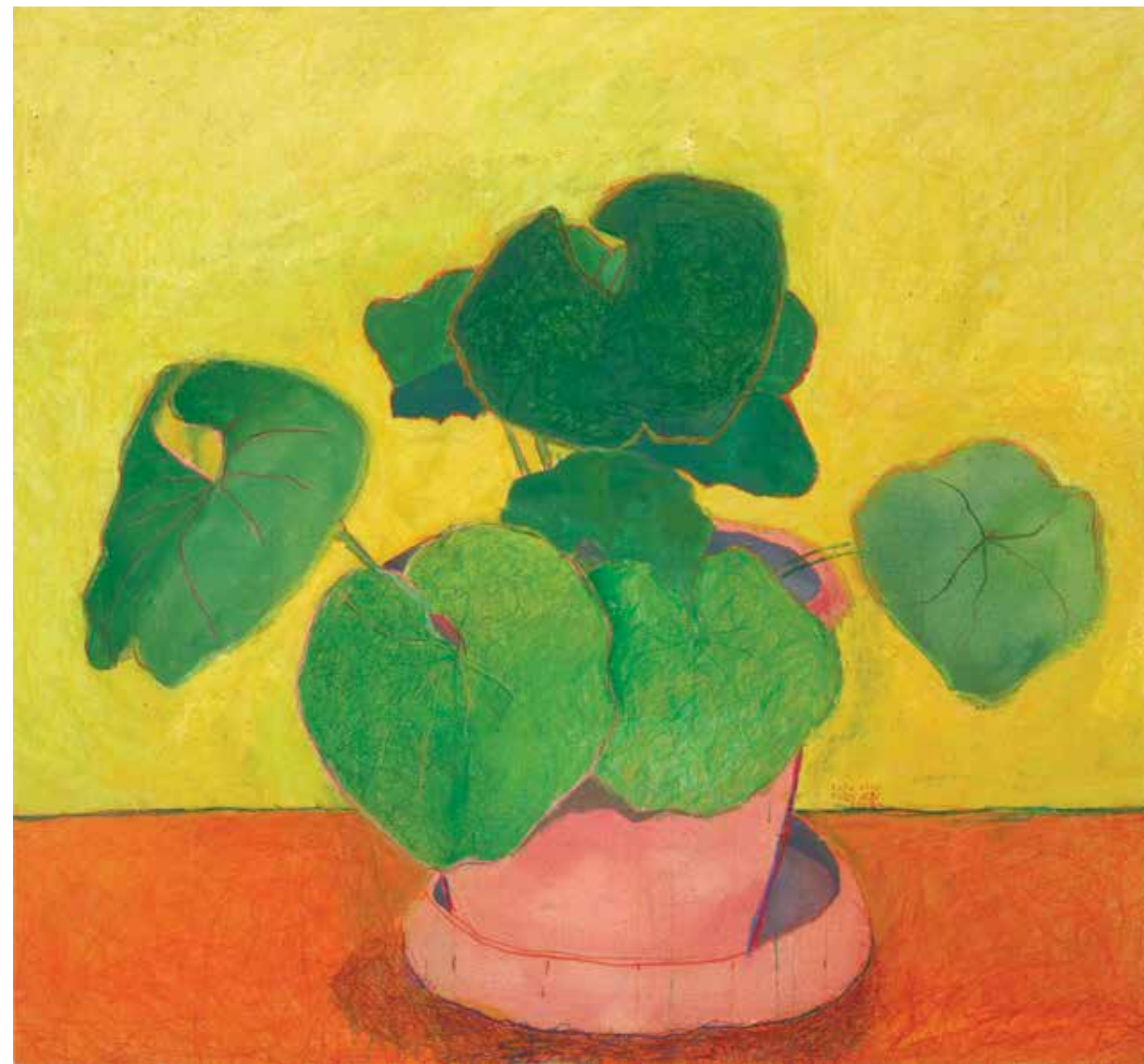
You Like My Blue Slippers? / You Like My Yellow Slippers? | Acrylic & color pencils on canvas | 40x37 cm / 40x35 cm | 2023 (upper)
Lets Icecream / No I am not Tipsy | Acrylic & color pencils on canvas | 29.5x29.5 cm / 35x35 cm | 2023 (lower)



Fuck Sundays | Acrylic & color pencils on canvas & craft paper | 70x60.5 cm | 2023



I Know You Like My Plant I | Acrylic & color pencil on canvas | 66x71 cm | 2023



I Know You Like My Plant II | Acrylic & color pencil on canvas | 66x71 cm | 2023



Lets Sit | Acrylic & color pencils on canvas | 110x120 cm | 2023



Oleander Flowers & Leaves II / III | Acrylic & color pencils on canvas | 110x120 cm | 2023



Untitled | color pencils on paper | 34x24 cm each | 2024 (upper)
Mmmmmmm / Ooooooops / Lets Icecream | Acrylic & wax on canvas | 30x30 cm each | 2024 (lower)



Untitled | color pencils on paper | 20x14 cm each | 2024 (upper)
Untitled | Acrylic & wax on canvas | 14x10 cm each | 2024 (lower)

About the Artist

Rola El Hussein was born in 1978 and graduated from the Lebanese University of Fine Arts in 2002. She lived and worked for many years in other countries before returning three years ago to Lebanon, to concentrate on her developing painting practice.

Always having the tendency to draw the objects that she chose to surround herself with, she slowly began to understand the connection between that intimacy and her introverted personality. This most recent exhibition, her second solo show, reflects a more sarcastic side to her character, highlighting a freedom and a daring sensitivity that allows her to play freely with anatomy alongside the other objects that make up her surroundings. There is throughout, a layered approach to her handling of materials, a transparency that revels in the playful possibilities of canvas, paper, paint, colour and line.

Rola is also a novelist and poet, and has published two novels and four poetry collections, the last 'The Planet of Short Times' published in 2023 by Dar Al Nahda Al Arabia. She also writes regularly for several websites.



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