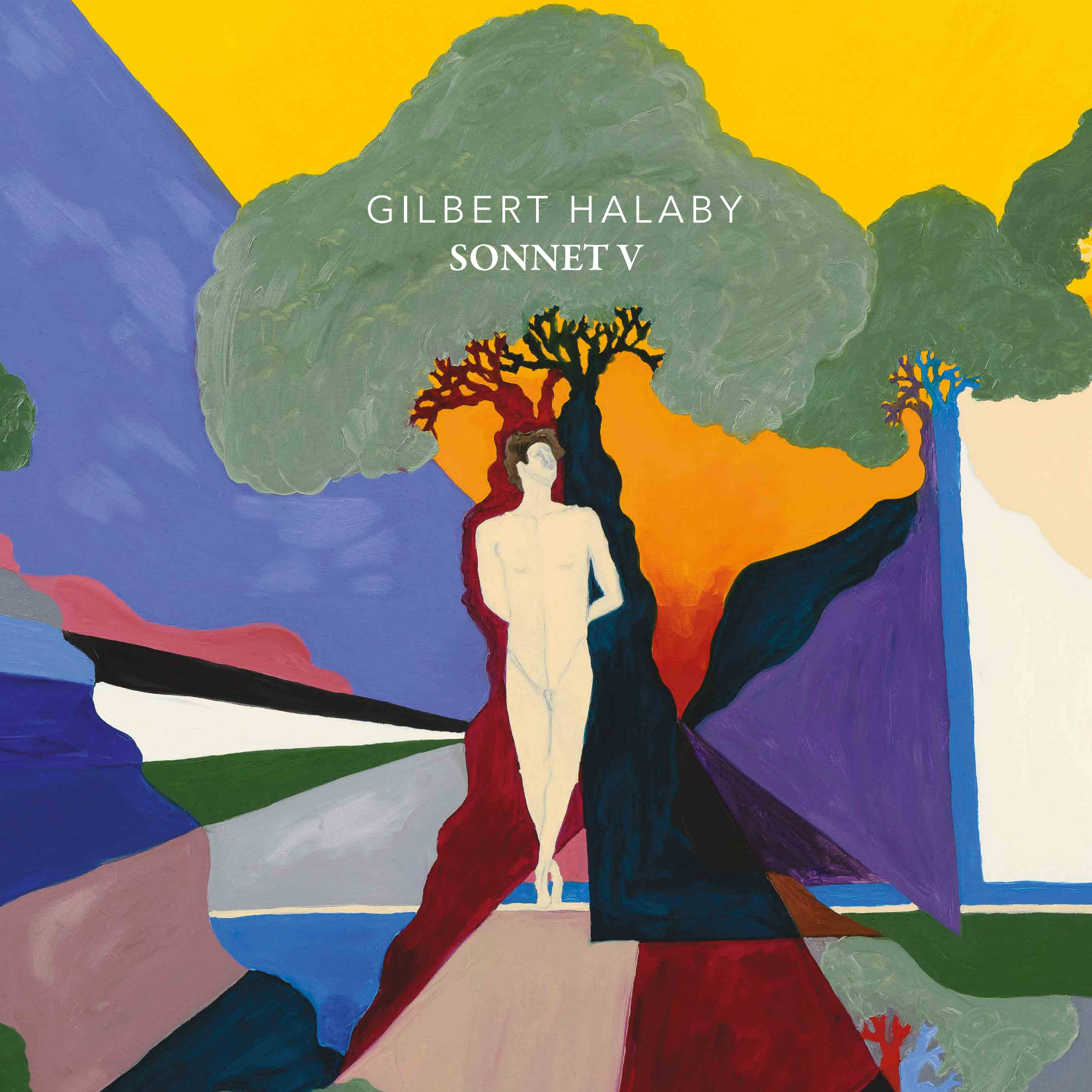


GILBERT HALABY  
SONNET V





GILBERT HALABY

**SONNET V**



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GILBERT HALABY

## SONNET V



SOLO EXHIBITION

LONDON

June 5 – June 15, 2025

Artbooth in collaboration with Marie Jose Gallery

## The Geometry of Memory: On the Paintings of Gilbert Halaby

There are artists who emerge early and burn quickly, and then there are those whose work feels slow-brewed by time—like tea steeped in memory. Gilbert Halaby belongs to the latter. Though he began painting as a child in Dhour El Choueir, Lebanon—at the improbable age of four—he only held his first exhibition in his homeland in 2023. This choice, deliberate and almost ceremonial, reveals something essential about Halaby: his art is an act of return.

To see Halaby's paintings is to read an autobiography in a language only he can fully decipher. But one need not know the grammar to feel its weight. His canvases, shaped by colour-blocks and bold, flat geometries, echo the fields of his childhood—poppies stretching across valleys under the insistent Levantine sun. The hues are never random. They carry both light and shadow, rooted in the geography of memory. There's a tenderness in the way he treats space—houses reduced to forms, yet vibrating with unspoken stories. He paints homes not as shelters, but as questions: What occurred within these walls? Who lived, left, or vanished?

Halaby writes in his *Sonnet V* letters: *"I long to belong to a place that existed only in the hours before waking."* This longing spills into his paintings. His late start—at least in the eyes of the formal art world—has been less a delay and more a distillation. Time has not dulled him but clarified him. His brush moves with the confidence of someone who has seen many cities, spoken many languages, but still listens most intently to the silence between things. There is a humility in the simplicity of his forms—squares, lines, roofs, windows—but also a rigor. Each painting feels like a pause. A held breath. The kind of stillness one encounters not before action, but after it—when reflection takes over. It's this introspective quality that renders his work autobiographical without being narrative. Each canvas functions as a self-portrait, not of the face, but of the inner architecture.

Halaby is also a writer, and often, his exhibitions are accompanied by text—fragments, poems, letters. He doesn't treat words and images as separate languages, but as twin threads of the same voice. His visual and verbal idioms are intimately tied. In fact, one senses that he builds his own vernacular—an alphabet that nods to influences like Etel Adnan, yet remains insistently his own. Like Adnan, Halaby understands the expansive potential of restraint: a few well-placed colours, a concise sentence, a precise silence.

And there is, always, that clarity of light. The Levantine light—not soft, but searing. It exposes more than it comforts. It is under this light that Halaby paints and remembers. His palette, vibrant but never excessive, seems to try and hold that brightness, to bottle it into permanence. There is a devotional quality to this—the kind of reverence that comes from distance, or perhaps from exile. In a world that so often demands speed, relevance, immediacy, Halaby's work dares to move differently. It is both ancient and modern, both local and exilic. It is work that doesn't shout, but lingers. Like a letter that arrives long after it was sent, carrying the scent of a place, a mood, a season.

In the end, Gilbert Halaby's paintings offer us a proposition: that to paint is to remember, and to remember is to reimagine. Each canvas is a house of return. A reconstruction—not of facts, but of feelings. Through colour and form, Halaby invites us into a home we might have once known, or might still be building.

Roxane Zand, Middle East Art Specialist and Author

Rome, Aprile 24 - 2025

My dearest boy,  
Someone once told me to paint my worst fears. How startled I was by the idea.  
You must know, my boy, that when you reach my years, you won't care about what others want to see in your work—maybe they want to see their fears—but what you care about is making your heart happy by painting what makes it happy.  
Your fears, my boy, are left behind. You shall metabolise all the scars with every breath and sunrise.  
Your fears are but dissolute memories under a bright sun, the sun of your tomorrow.  
To every dark desire, reply with colours and light, and paint what is most precious to your heart—words and poems.

While I write these words that the light of our Levantine Sun will deliver to you under the olive tree, the strokes of my brushes are painting sonnets and poems.  
You and I, my dearest, can't help but translate beautiful words into poems of colours on eager and welcoming canvases.  
Stories of the imaginations and visions of beloved poets are weaved into our metaphysical utopia, where the light rhymes and the prose becomes a poem.  
That, my boy, will make your heart happy and remind everyone that fears and shadows are part of days long gone and ought never to weigh on your heart.

Know, my boy, that you shall always learn in life, and you shall meet a marvellous teacher who will introduce you to the greatest magician, a poet who transformed words into horizons where you and millions of mortals gaze.  
Shakespeare, my boy, is the magician that will accompany you in this poem of light that you shall entitle "Sonnet V" - this sonnet is the passage of time from summer to winter, youth to decay.  
Shakespeare insists on the need to bring a child into the world; that's his recipe to save one's summer. Alas, Shakespeare's son and daughters left this existence; his words were the only summer he left behind. And you and I, my boy, shall leave our canvases, our eternal summer in the hope that the hearts of some mortals will be illuminated for centuries to come.  
I wrote these words two years ago, my boy; please keep them safe in your heart and do as they say:

"Read till you can write.  
Caress your heart with ideas of the sublime, but never forget to water your thoughts. Walk the words of your favourite minds to the sea, but bathe in your own melodies of letters and observe the Sun sailing past with a poem from your lips.  
Read till you can plant sunshine into the hearts of humans."

Know that your every breath, my boy, will be metamorphosed into words on paper and colours on canvases.  
Never cease to see the light because it is always there for you and keep listening to your heart because all your answers are etched on its walls.

I kiss your hands, shoulders and forehead and wish you only light.

Gilbert Halaby



Last time I spoke to you, dearest reader, I left you on the shores of that blessed island bathing in the eternal Sun. I remember that I made you promise to plant a tree whenever you could because, as I said before, trees were our first refuge, and they are going to be our last.

Today, I return to accompany you on a new voyage through the four seasons of our lives, into the four stages of love toward nature and our souls.

Come with me, and let's put words to the landscapes of our hearts.  
See, my friend, my life is made of words and colours, and I can't help but savour the marvels that beautiful minds have written through the centuries and transformed into seasons.  
You are embarking on a journey with me today, which is titled SONNET V. This youth that Shakespeare gave life to in between his lines is now on my canvas; his destiny, as all of ours, is winter and decay, but rest assured that if you can create, your spring shall always live. My spring, my dear, will always live through these colours you are seeing now, and Shakespeare's spring will always live through his words.

*Those hours, that with gentle work did frame  
The lovely gaze where every eye doth dwell,  
Will play the tyrants to the very same  
And that unfair which fairly doth excel;  
For never-resting time leads summer on  
To hideous winter, and confounds him there;  
Sap checked with frost, and lusty leaves quite gone,  
Beauty o'er-snowed and bareness every where:  
Then were not summer's distillation left,  
A liquid prisoner pent in walls of glass,  
Beauty's effect with beauty were bereft,  
Nor it, nor no remembrance what it was:  
But flowers distill'd, though they with winter meet,  
Leese but their show; their substance still lives sweet.*

SONNET V  
2025 | Oil on canvas | 200 cm Diameter



For the love of words, I have personified my four seasons,  
Spring is the birth of all. Can you listen to Rimbaud chanting his May Banners?

*In the bright lime-tree branches  
Dies a fainting mort. But lively song  
Flutters among the currant bushes.  
So that our bloods may laugh in our veins,  
See the vines tangling themselves.*

*The sky is as pretty as an angel,  
The azure and the wave commune.  
I go out. If a sunbeam wounds me  
I shall succumb on the moss.  
Being patient and being bored  
Are too simple. To the devil with my cares.*

*I want dramatic summer  
To bind me to its chariot of fortune.  
Let me most because of you, o Nature, -  
Ah ! less alone and less useless ! - die.*

*There where the Shepherds, it's strange,  
Die more or less because of the world.  
I am willing that the seasons should wear me out.  
To you, Nature, I surrender ;  
With my hunger and all my thirst.*

*And, if it please you, feed and water me.  
Nothing, nothing at all deceives me ;  
To laugh at the sun is to laugh at one's parents,  
But I do not wish to laugh at anything ;  
And may this misfortune go free.*

SPRING | RIMBAUD  
2024 | Oil on canvas | 100 cm Diameter





Would you serve Bacchus his summer wine, sit under an olive tree,  
and sip with us the elixir of life listening to Emerson recite his poem?

*BRING me wine, but wine which never grew  
In the belly of the grape,  
Or grew on vine whose tap-roots, reaching through  
Under the Andes to the Cape,  
Suffer'd no savour of the earth to 'scape.*

*Let its grapes the morn salute  
From a nocturnal root,  
Which feels the acrid juice  
Of Styx and Erebus;  
And turns the woe of Night,  
By its own craft, to a more rich delight.*

*We buy ashes for bread;  
We buy diluted wine;  
Give me of the true,  
Whose ample leaves and tendrils curl'd  
Among the silver hills of heaven  
Draw everlasting dew;  
Wine of wine,  
Blood of the world,  
Form of forms, and mould of statues,  
That I intoxicated,  
And by the draught assimilated,  
May float at pleasure through all natures;  
The bird-language rightly spell,  
And that which roses say so well:*

*Wine that is shed  
Like the torrents of the sun  
Up the horizon walls,  
Or like the Atlantic streams, which run  
When the South Sea calls.*

*Water and bread,  
Food which needs no transmuting,  
Rainbow-flowering, wisdom-fruited,*

*Wine which is already man,  
Food which teach and reason can.*

*Wine which Music is,—  
Music and wine are one,—  
That I, drinking this,  
Shall hear far Chaos talk with me;  
Kings unborn shall walk with me;  
And the poor grass shall plot and plan  
What it will do when it is man.  
Quickened so, will I unlock  
Every crypt of every rock.*

*I thank the joyful juice  
For all I know;  
Winds of remembering  
Of the ancient being blow,  
And seeming-solid walls of use  
Open and flow.*

*Pour, Bacchus! the remembering wine;  
Retrieve the loss of me and mine!  
Vine for vine be antidote,  
And the grape requite the lote!  
Haste to cure the old despair;  
Reason in Nature's lotus drench'd—  
The memory of ages quench'd—  
Give them again to shine;  
Let wine repair what this undid;  
And where the infection slid,  
A dazzling memory revive;  
Refresh the faded tints,  
Recut the aged prints,  
And write my old adventures with the pen  
Which on the first day drew,  
Upon the tablets blue,  
The dancing Pleiads and eternal men.*

SUMMER | BACCHUS  
2024 | Oil on canvas | 100 cm Diameter





And now come along to hear a poet I adore; he made me love Autumn  
with every yellow leaf that falls and every promise of rebirth.  
Have you ever read Rilke's marvellous words?  
Here is his Autumn:

*The leaves fall, fall as from far,  
Like distant gardens withered in the heavens;  
They fall with slow and lingering descent.*

*And in the nights the heavy Earth, too, falls  
From out the stars into the Solitude.*

*Thus all doth fall. This hand of mine must fall  
And lo! the other one:—it is the law.  
But there is One who holds this falling  
Infinitely softly in His hands.*

AUTUMN | RILKE  
2024 | Oil on canvas | 100 cm Diameter



And at last, let us celebrate the dormant nature  
with the most extraordinary sacrifice, the union between us,  
sons and daughters of Nature and Her.  
Under the tender branches of an olive tree stands Saint Sebastian,  
with his blood colouring the soil that will give birth to red poppies  
and an enchanted spring.  
He shall always be the song of harmony  
and the promise of a magnificent rebirth.

WINTER | SAINT SEBASTIAN  
2024 | Oil on canvas | 100 cm Diameter



Come, let's rest now in this luminous home on that tender hill, sing Spring's hymns, and get enchanted by the yellow light that is not in the horizons but in our hearts. We know that our habitat is nature, and we struggle to unshackle what chains us in cement jungles so that we can go back into her warm embrace.

SPRING  
2024 | Oil on canvas | 150 x 150 cm





I know, my dear reader, that you long for the blue song, and I can assure you that I do, too.  
Come, then, let's bathe in the gift of the gods, let the waves caress our hearts, plant the will and strength to face the sombre days ahead, and let the salty horizons teach us patience and the words that compose a divine poem of eternal summer.

SUMMER  
2024 | Oil on canvas | 150 x 150 cm



Alas, you know deep in your heart that the time comes when you have to prepare your soul for winter, and nature's gift for you is Autumn with its poetic rhythm. Get ready, my dear. Harvest your precious thoughts and store them for the dark days to come. Harvest the autumn light and transform it into a robe of melodies. When the sun hides behind winter's clouds, chant your melody for her to hear.

AUTUMN  
2024 | Oil on canvas | 150 x 150 cm



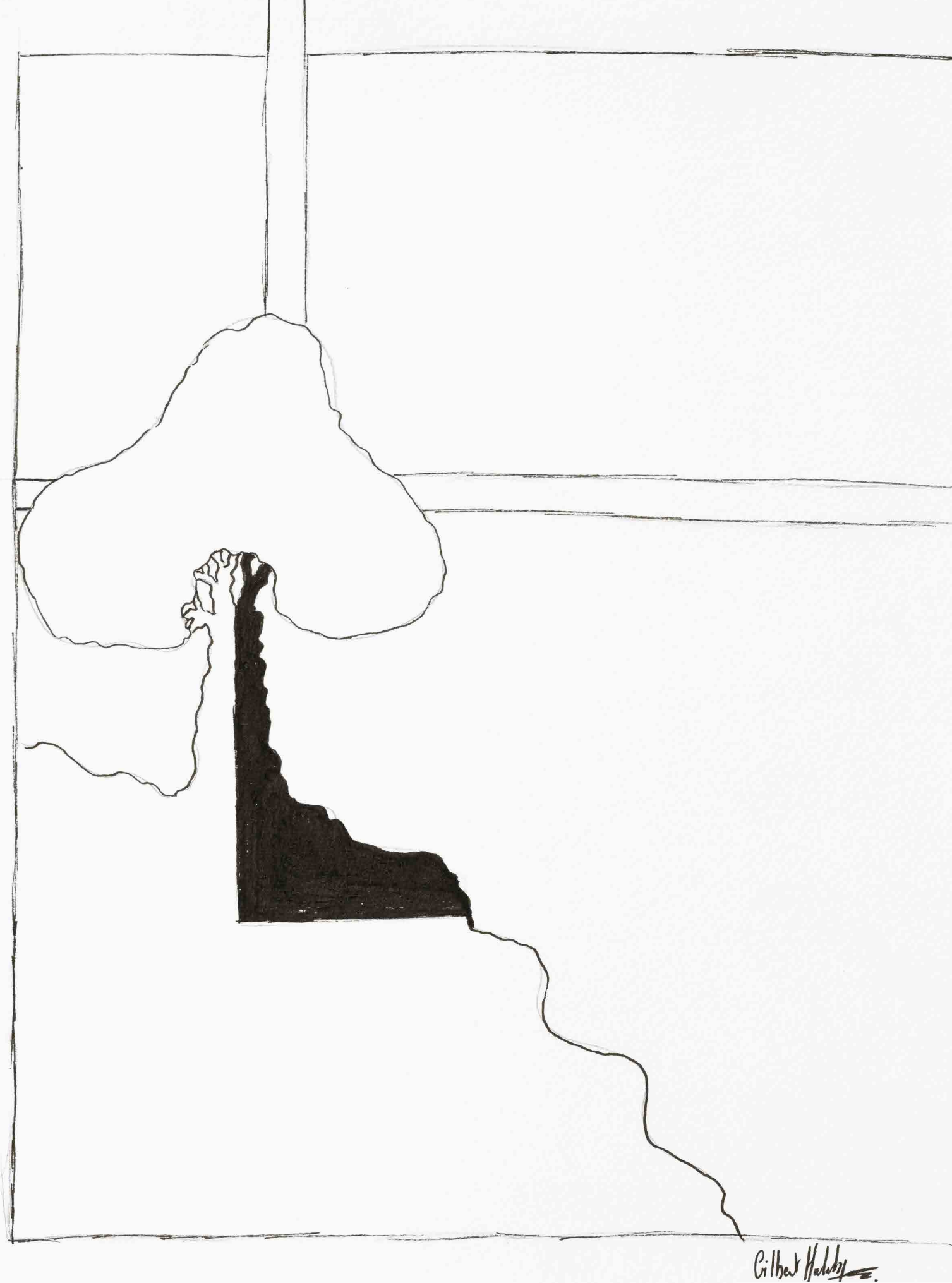


What now, my dear?  
Do you fear the darkness? Have you harvested light during our  
voyage? Have you planted the precious seeds of poppies in your  
heart? Have you transformed your sunny days into a second skin  
to prevent cold penetrating your heart?  
Have you got the summer in your veins?  
I wish you light through your winter my dear companion and until  
we meet again, plant trees for your heart and for the young hearts  
to come.

WINTER  
2024 | Oil on canvas | 150 x 150 cm







Gilbert H. H. H.

THE SIBYLS  
ANNOUNCING  
THE FOUR SEASONS

SPRING  
2025 | Oil on canvas | 60 x 50 cm



SUMMER  
2025 | Oil on canvas | 60 x 50 cm

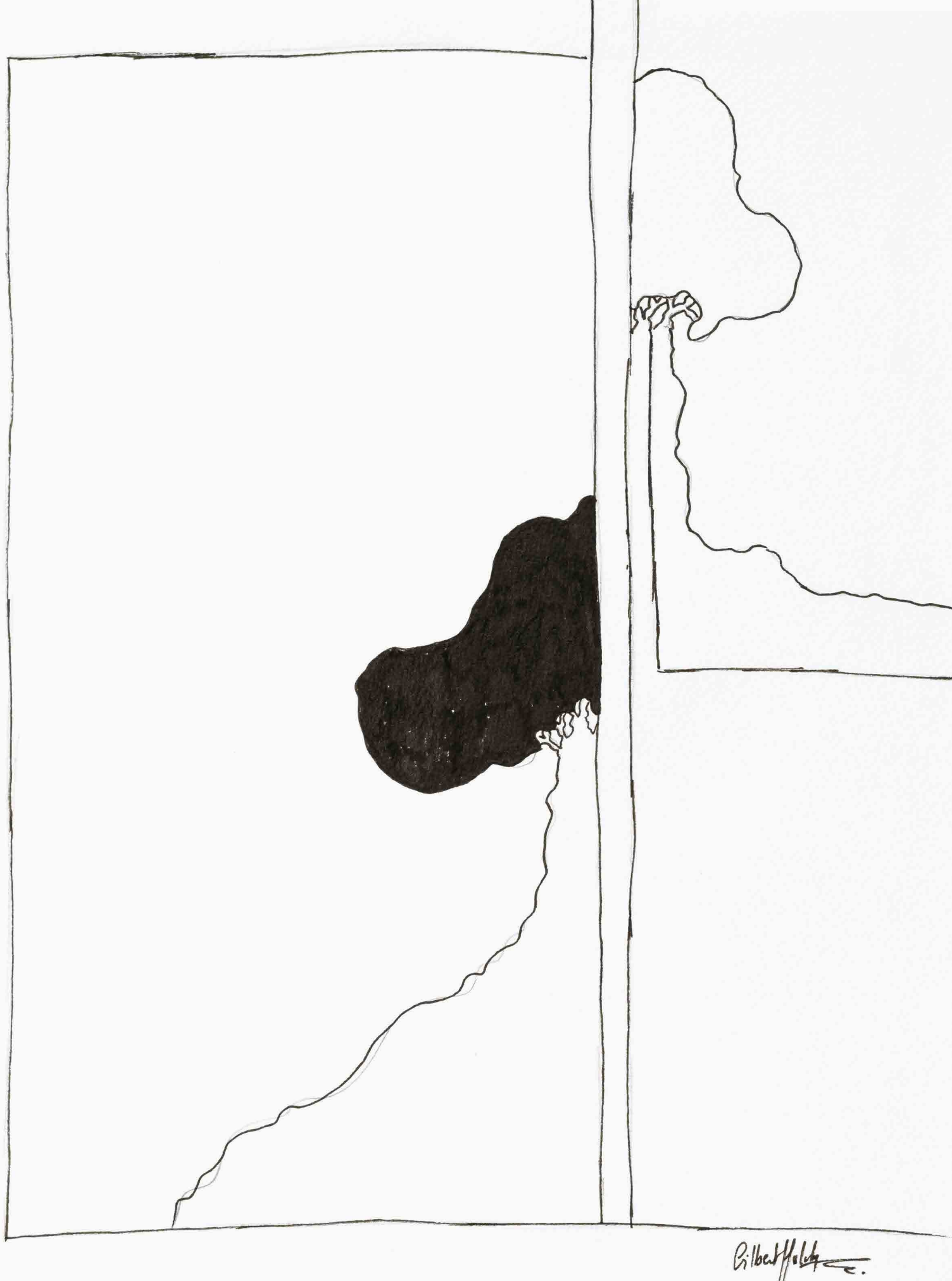






WINTER  
2025 | Oil on canvas | 60 x 50 cm





A METAPHYSICAL SHADE  
THROUGH THE FOUR SEASONS

*Gilbert Holby*



SPRING  
2025 | Oil on canvas | 40 x 40 cm





SUMMER  
2025 | Oil on canvas | 40 x 40 cm



AUTUMN  
2025 | Oil on canvas | 40 x 40 cm





WINTER  
2025 | Oil on canvas | 40 x 40 cm

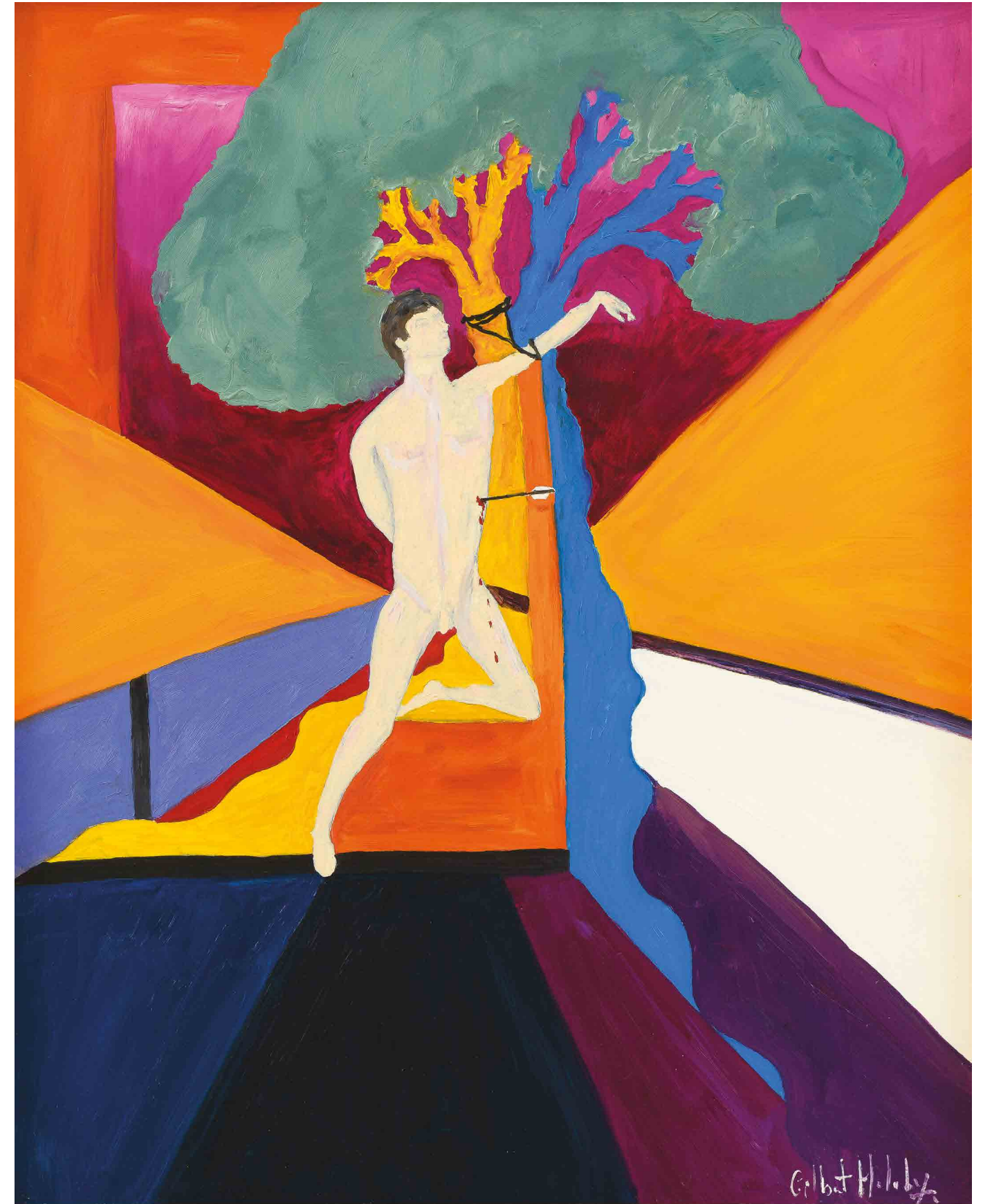


STUDY FOR SONNET V  
2024 | Oil on wood | 50 x 60 cm





STUDY FOR SAINT SEBASTIAN  
2024 | Oil on canvas | 50 x 40 cm





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Gilbert Halaby, born in 1979, who grew up in Lebanon and studied in Beirut, has drawn and painted since he was a child.

Captivated by the beauty of the natural landscape in Mount Lebanon, he would spend long hours playing in the woods amid the olive and pine trees signal natural forms which, to this day, influence and play a profound role in his art.

His aesthetic eye first drew him to the artistry of fashion. After studying achaeology at the Lebanese University in Beirut, he went to Rome and was instantly captivated, calling that first encounter un coup de foudre.

In 2003, he moved to the Eternal City and opened a jewellery and handbag store near the Pantheon.

In 2010, the Maison Halaby brand launched its fi rst women’s collection; in 2016, Halaby opened his accessories boutique of specially made leather handbags at Via di Monserrato 21.

As much a cultural salon as a boutique, where the artist keeps a library of contemporary and historical authors andphilosophers and entertains his friends, it has become a global cult destination.

But with art as his first love (and clearly a talent his clients appreciated:

the paintings and watercolours he hung on the boutique’s walls were swiftly bought up, and more requested), much of his time is now spent painting at his studio, a few steps away from the Maison on Via di Monserrato 123.

Entirely self-taught as a painter, Halaby’s style has been honed over the past six years, in which he has dedicated himself daily to painting in his studio.

Gilbert Halaby debuted in March 2023 with his solo exhibition titled “Domus Berytus”, which took place at Beit Beirut Museum in the Lebanese capital.

His second Solo took place in his adoptive city, Rome, under the title of: “Une Comédie Romaine” - at Maja Arte Contemporanea (June 2023).

His third solo - “Will You Wait For Me Under That Pine Tree?” - opened in January 2024 in Abu Dhabi at ArtBooth.

His Fourth Solo - “Apogee Of Light” - Opened in March 2024 in Palm Beach at Maja Arte Contemporanea’s first gallery popup.

In October 2024 - he opened another solo exhibition “ The First Harvest” at the IAMY museum of Hydra, Greece.

Upcoming solo exhibition “Sonnet V” at Marie-Jose Gallery in South Kensington, London opening on June 5th, 2025

Gilbert Halaby’s art is part of important private collections and part of the permanent collections of : Malvina Menegaz Foundation, Castelbasso, Italy.

Kinda Foundation, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

The Leabanesese Presidential Contemperory Collection.

*“I do what I do  
so that  
when I am  
on my death bed,  
I can look back  
and smile”*

Gilbert Halaby



**ArtBooth** MARIE JOSE GALLERY  
ABU DHABI | SEOUL

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