

The Innerverse of Jônatas

An Art Series on Immigration and Exile



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Biography

Jônatas Chimen Dias DaSilva-Benayon, or simply "Jônatas" (b.1981), is a Brazilian-American Symbolist artist, author, and academic. His work explores personal and collective identity amidst a complicated and ever-changing cultural landscape. The artist's exploration of identity is often drawn from his own family history of migration, adaptation, and hybridization.

Jônatas' art is process-based, ranging in technique from realism to contemporary approaches in 2D, 3D, and Time-Based formats. Jônatas often makes use of pastiches of immigration documents, DNA tests, Inquisitional archives, and personal diaries. Overall, his message of embracing one's cultural identity and disclosing personal beliefs is a recurring theme in his work.

For the past 2 decades Jônatas' art has been featured in numerous biennales, museums, galleries, and art auctions. Some of his ground-breaking exhibits have taken place at The Jerusalem Biennale, The MONA Biennale, The Patricia and Phillip Frost Art Museum, the Jewish Museum of Florida, Miami Basel Art Week, and Artexpo New York. In 2015, Jônatas was awarded the title of Artist of the Year by the Anti-Defamation League for his art series titled The Journey, which focuses on a narrative of survival from exile and genocide.

Jônatas holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Latin American, Caribbean, and Iberian Studies from The University of Madison-Wisconsin, and a Master of Fine Arts degree from Florida International University.

Introduction
by
Jônatas

Imagine we are not bound to living only in this Universe, but instead, we live in a Multiverse. Imagine there are infinite versions of you roaming around in this Multiverse, each unaware of the others, each living a life with completely different possibilities and outcomes. As bizarre as this may seem, it so happens that some of the world's greatest thinkers and physicists have independently arrived at the conclusion that we might, indeed, live in a multiverse reality.

Clara Moskowitz—writer for *SPACE* and *Live Science*—explains that because “space-time goes on forever, then it must start repeating [itself] at some point, [since there is only] a finite number of ways particles can be arranged in space and time” (1). A few of the possibilities that support this idea are the Theory of Parallel Universes, the Theory of Bubble Universes, and the Theory of Daughter Universes.

However, before letting our imaginations run wild, it behooves us to ask if there is any verifiable proof that indeed we live in a multiverse. Apparently, Ranga-Ram Chary has found just that—as the Project Scientist and Project Manager of the U.S. Planck Data Center at Caltech, Chary's 2015 research details strange abnormalities in cosmic microwave background (CMB), radiation leftover after the Big Bang. Chary found these abnormalities using the Planck telescope. He saw what could be evidence of a “bruising” that occurs when one universe bumps up against another: “Think of it as bubbles in a soda bottle...Each bubble is a Universe. If the bubbles were rare, they would never collide, and we'd never know the existence of the other Universe...If however, they are not rare, they may collide, and we can see the imprint of it in the [cosmic microwave background] (CMB). Chary's ideas about colliding universes brings the multiverse into the realm of a testable hypothesis, and out of the realm of speculation” (2).

These theories inspired my latest art series called *The Innerverse of Jônatas*—at least philosophically and emotionally—and its focus on the universe within. After all, as an artist, I have not only observed the randomness of life (which seems to be the consequence of arbitrary successes and failures, coincidences and mismatches, heartbreak and love, birth and death), but I also have seen repeated patterns.

Those patterns are particularly observable when analyzing one's ancestral history, especially when aided by multigenerational immigration documents, old family photos, genealogical charts, elderly testimonials, and DNA analysis. I did not always possess such family treasures, but once I became an immigrant myself 20 years ago, I went to great lengths to obtain the puzzle pieces necessary to understand my family's long history of immigration. I discovered that they migrated every two to three generations, in a long exile beginning with the Iberian Inquisitions of the fifteenth century. I finally learned that what caused their diaspora was their Iberian-converso heritage (3).

Materially speaking, *The Innerverse of Jônatas* features a small branch of my ancestors who stayed in Southern Spain until 1909, when increased social, political, economic, and religious pressures brought great risk to their lives. Their faces, mixed with those of my immediate family members, are collaged into the surrealist blue world of this collection. But above all, *The Innerverse of Jônatas* is an homage to all of the world's immigrants, for it is due to their courage, defiance, and power of adaptation that we are here today.

The Innerverse of Jônatas is about the emotional landscape within those who were completely stripped of their comfort and familiarity (thus their symbolic naked bodies), so that they could forge a new universe of renewed possibilities for all of us.

In essence, not much has changed since the persecutions of the fifteenth century, and regardless of the time and place, everything is still intertwined and linked—including the oppressors' fear of change and of the "other." But thankfully, positive elements also remain stout: Our ability to love one another, our sympathy towards fellow humans, and our undying belief in a better tomorrow.

It was uncanny to realize that many of us have lived almost carbon-copied life-narratives, differing just in time period, with decades or even centuries in between. Take the contrast between my great-grandfather Luis Chimenes and me: Luis was a young artist who migrated from Spain to Brazil in 1909 at the age of 15; about 90 years later in 1998, his great-grandson Jônatas would emigrate from Brazil to the United States, also around the age of 15.

A coincidence? Maybe. A pattern? Certainly. Luis' universe came colliding against mine in a variety of ways, setting the tone for generations both before and after me. Luis' own existence even influenced my art, with echoes of his universalist views, his lingering nostalgia, and his never-ending hope for a redemptive future for himself and his (still) immigrant family.

Of course, this may all be just impressions and accidents. Indeed, I simply cannot claim that any of those coincidences are the product of a 'bruising' that occurred between colliding universes. But as a contemporary artist, I am obliged to observe avidly, think imaginatively, reflect deeply, and experiment constantly. I must ask improbable questions, think of (often) absurd theories, and hopefully create a few thought-provoking scenarios. It is only by this practice that I can arrive at the inspirations that help me produce compelling works of art—that is how I arrived at *The Innerverse of Jônatas*.

I can unquestionably say that my family's history of constant migration, adaptation, and hybridization has caused strong emotional links and patterns to repeat from person to person, generation to generation, actions to reaction, and forces to motions. I think this works much like in Isaac Newton's Law of Cause and Effect, in which a first event is partly responsible for a second event and that second event is partly dependent on the first.

In the actual making of *The Innerverse of Jônatas*, the concept of one reality deriving from another took center stage. That is why I could not just start by creating paintings or drawings; after all, those two art forms typically begin on crisp clean paper or blank canvases. It was necessary for this art series to begin on something unclean, tarnished, and reusable. Therefore, I was patient and allowed the concept to dictate the right medium.

Since I was under the mindset that everything and everyone is linked to a previous or parallel existence, I thought Monotyping was the ideal technique for a starting point. Monotypes belong to the printmaking genre of two-dimensional art, and they are made by rubbing oil ink from a smooth copper plate using a clean piece of fabric. This is a process that requires one to think of negative spaces instead of outlines, as figures appear through the removal of ink. Think of it as a subtractive process, much like sculpting a figure from a marble slab with a chisel.

Once satisfied with the design, a piece of paper is placed against the plate and both objects are put through a press. After running through the press, the paper is lifted, revealing a fresh new picture.

With monotypes, a successful printing can only happen once (unlike with etchings, which are carved onto plates, thus allowing for multiple prints). However, because my plates were always reused and never totally cleaned after each use, over time my monotypes ended up carrying echoes from previously-pressed works. That is why I chose this technique as the starting point for *The Inniverse of Jônatas*.

In the final step of the process, I pressed hundreds of monotypes and laid them side-by-side. Then, I ripped each picture into smaller pieces and began observing. This time, I simply pondered on the many detached figures—all those flying women, fighting men, marching infants, and crying hybrid figures—and tried to find meaning in them.

Eventually, the figures would begin speaking to one another, which signaled the start of new compositions. I then brought out the elements that first moved me to make this art series: the memories, the fragments, old identities, new identities, and the promise of redemption. I added paint, text, pastiches of cut fabric, and anything else that I deemed necessary to complete each panel.

That is when I suddenly understood what had been crafted before me: a very clear narrative that remains anchored to older storylines. That is the purpose of *The Inniverse of Jônatas*: to serve as a visual testimony that different universes must always clash with each other, all in order to create exciting realities for us to rediscover, constantly and relentlessly, just like our ancestors once did.

Sources:

1. Clara Moskowitz, December 7, 2012. 5 Reasons We May Live in a Multiverse. Retrieved January 16, 2018, from <https://www.space.com/18811-multiple-universes-5-theories.html>
2. Stephanie Margaret Bucklin, January 18, 2017. Is the multiverse physics, philosophy, or something else entirely? Retrieved January 16, 2018, from <http://astronomy.com/news/2017/01/what-is-the-multiverse>
3. Jews who converted to Roman Catholicism in Spain or Portugal, particularly during the 14th and 15th centuries, or one of their descendants

This Is The Future

11" x 14"

Mixed Media on Wood Panel

THIS IS

THE

FUTURE



JONATAS

come Dance With Me.

11" x 14"

Mixed Media on Wood Panel



DANCE

WITH

ME...

SONATAS

but have no Expectations

11 " x 14 "

Mixed Media on Wood Panel



Expectation.

JONATAS

after all, this is the 1492 Fashion Week...

11 " x 14 "

Mixed Media on Wood Panel



1492
FASHION
WEEK

JONAS

and while I Am Lovely But Distant

11" x 14"

Mixed Media on Wood Panel



I AM

LOVELY

BUT

DISTANT



ONATA

Do Not Forget:

11" x 14"

Mixed Media on Wood Panel



DO

NOT

FORGET

JÓNATAS

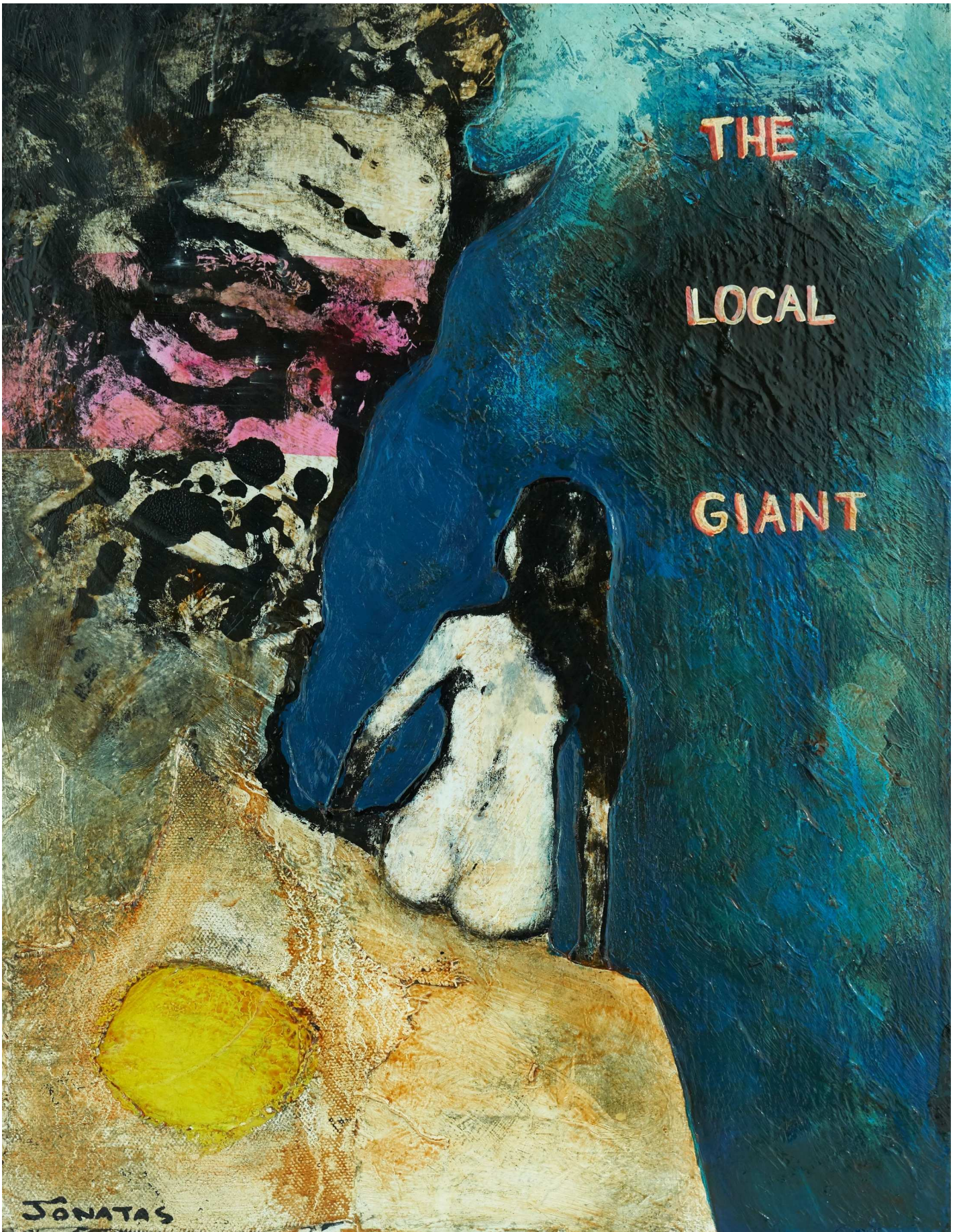
i am also The Local Giant

11" x 14"

Mixed Media on Wood Panel

THE
LOCAL
GIANT

JONATAS



and this is my Blood Line!

11" x 14"

Mixed Media on Wood Panel

BLOOD LINE



JÔNATAS

To Go Or Not To Go? I always ask...

11" x 14"

Mixed Media on Wood Panel



TO GO

NOT TO

GO

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TEMPORARY EVIDENCE OF
LAWFUL ADMISSION FOR
PERMANENT RESIDENCE
VALID UNTIL *Aug 25, 2006*
EMPLOYMENT AUTHORIZED

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8-25-05 - *MA*

VISTOS - VISAS
17

JONATAS

am I Too Amorous?

11" x 14"

Mixed Media on Wood Panel

A MOROUS



JÔNATAS

too much of a Voyeur?

11" x 14"

Mixed Media on Wood Panel

VOYEUR



JÔNATAS

at least Mama Knows Best!

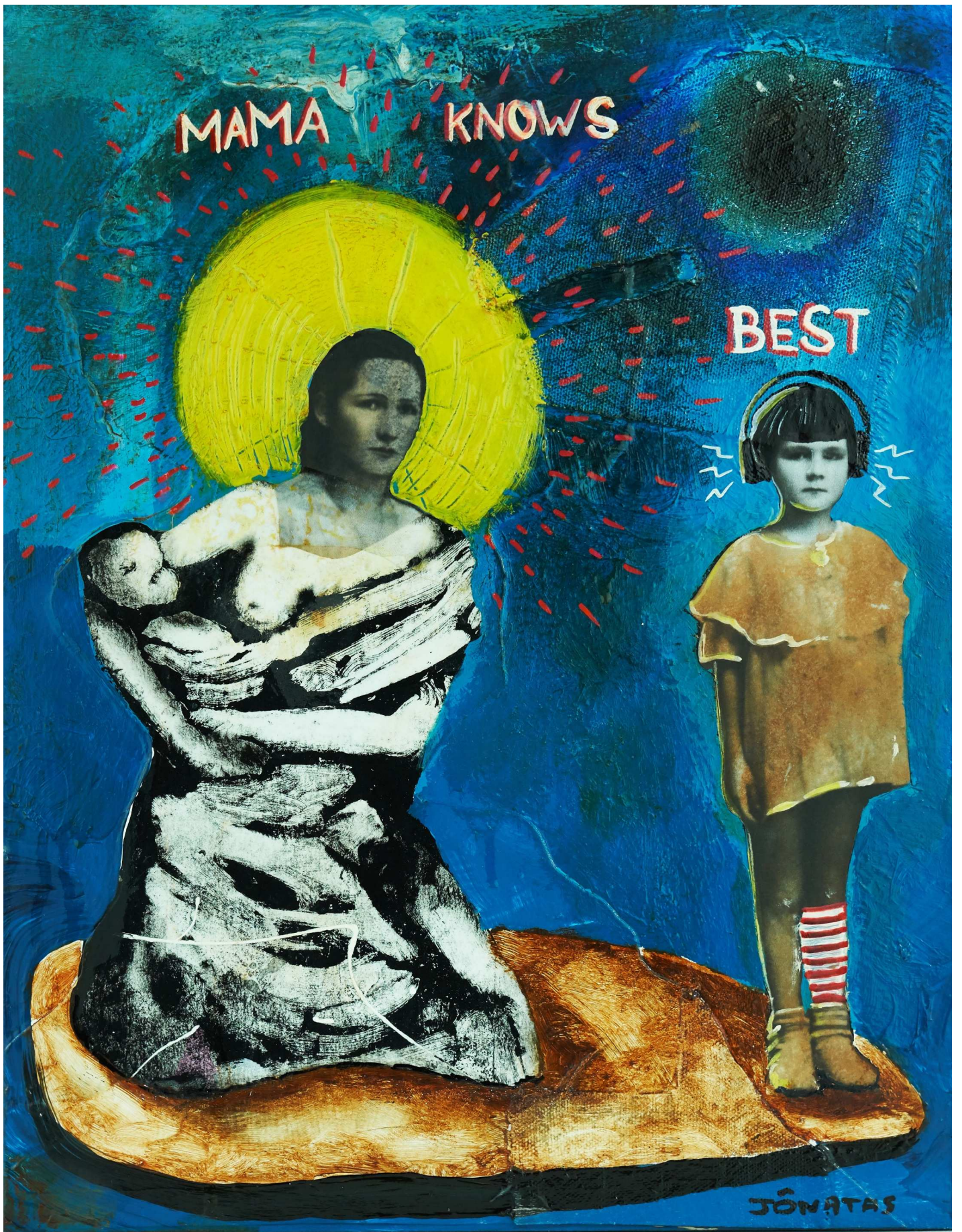
11" x 14"

Mixed Media on Wood Panel

MAMA KNOWS

BEST

JONATAS



1492 Never Ends here
11" x 14"
Mixed Media on Wood Panel

1492



NEVER

ENDS



JONATAS

Goya Saw It too

11" x 14"

Mixed Media on Wood Panel

GOYA
SAW
IT....



JONATAS

performing A Balancing Act everyday

11" x 14"

Mixed Media on Wood Panel

A

BALANCING

ACT



S
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yet, it just Can't Bring Me Down

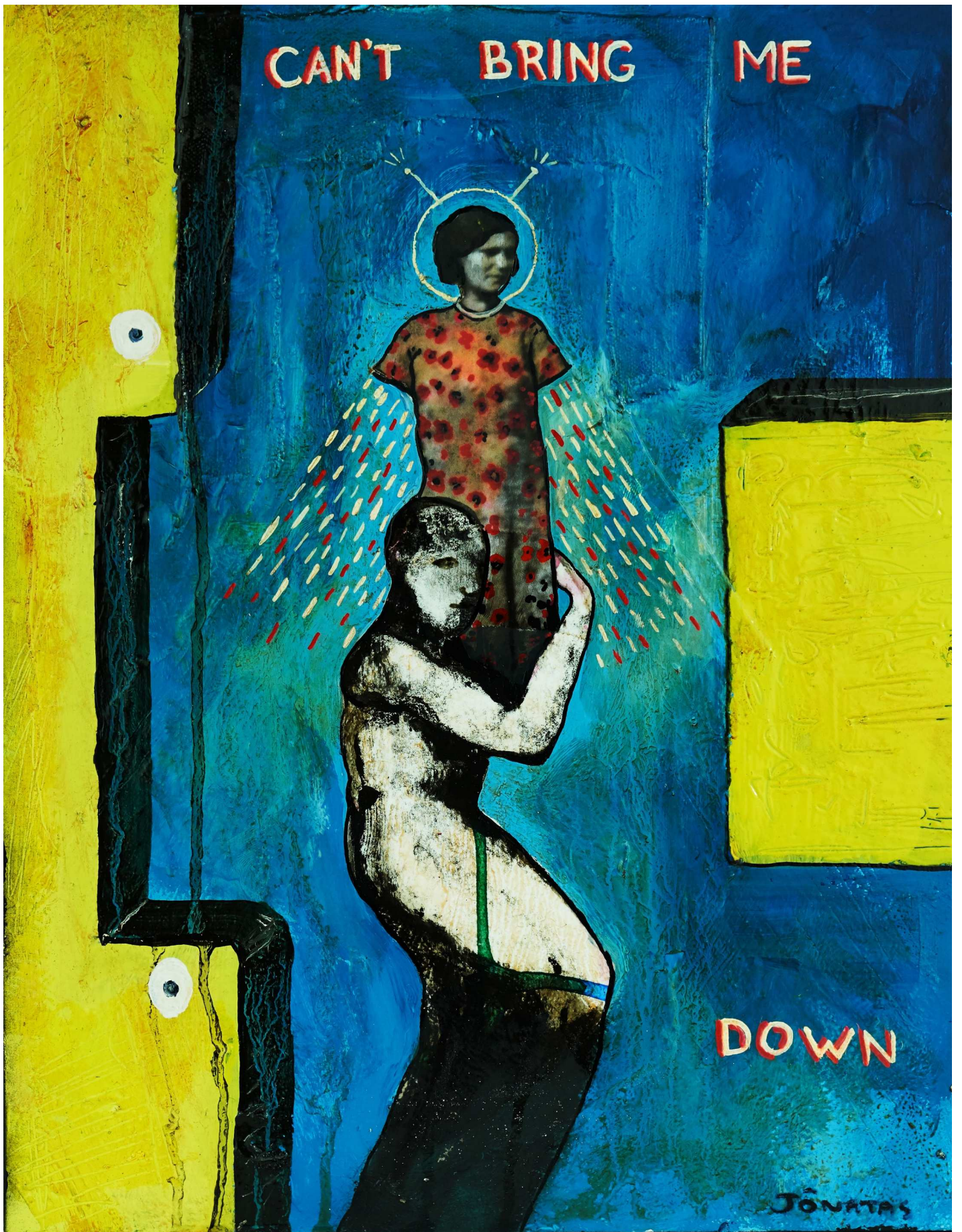
11" x 14"

Mixed Media on Wood Panel

CAN'T BRING ME

DOWN

JONATAS

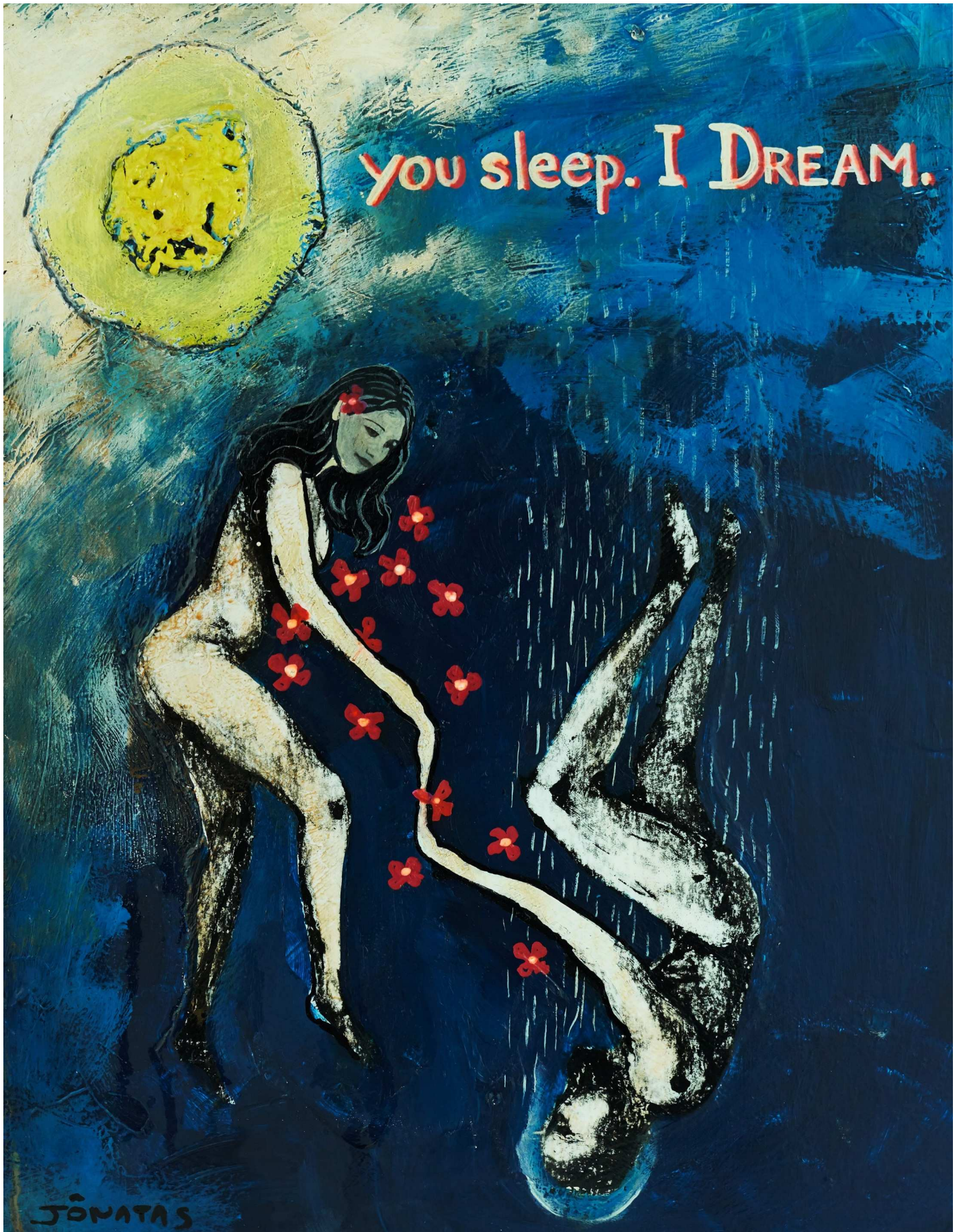


for while You Sleep, I Dream

11" x 14"

Mixed Media on Wood Panel

you sleep. I DREAM.



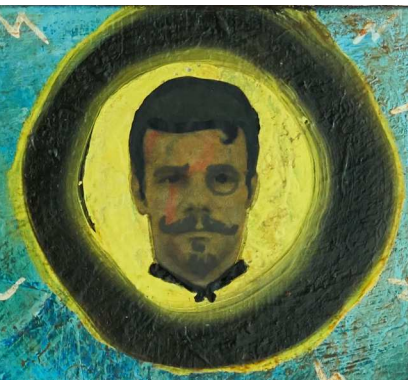
JONATAS

And I know Who Runs the World

11 " x 14 "

Mixed Media on Wood Panel

WHO
RUNS
THE
WORLD

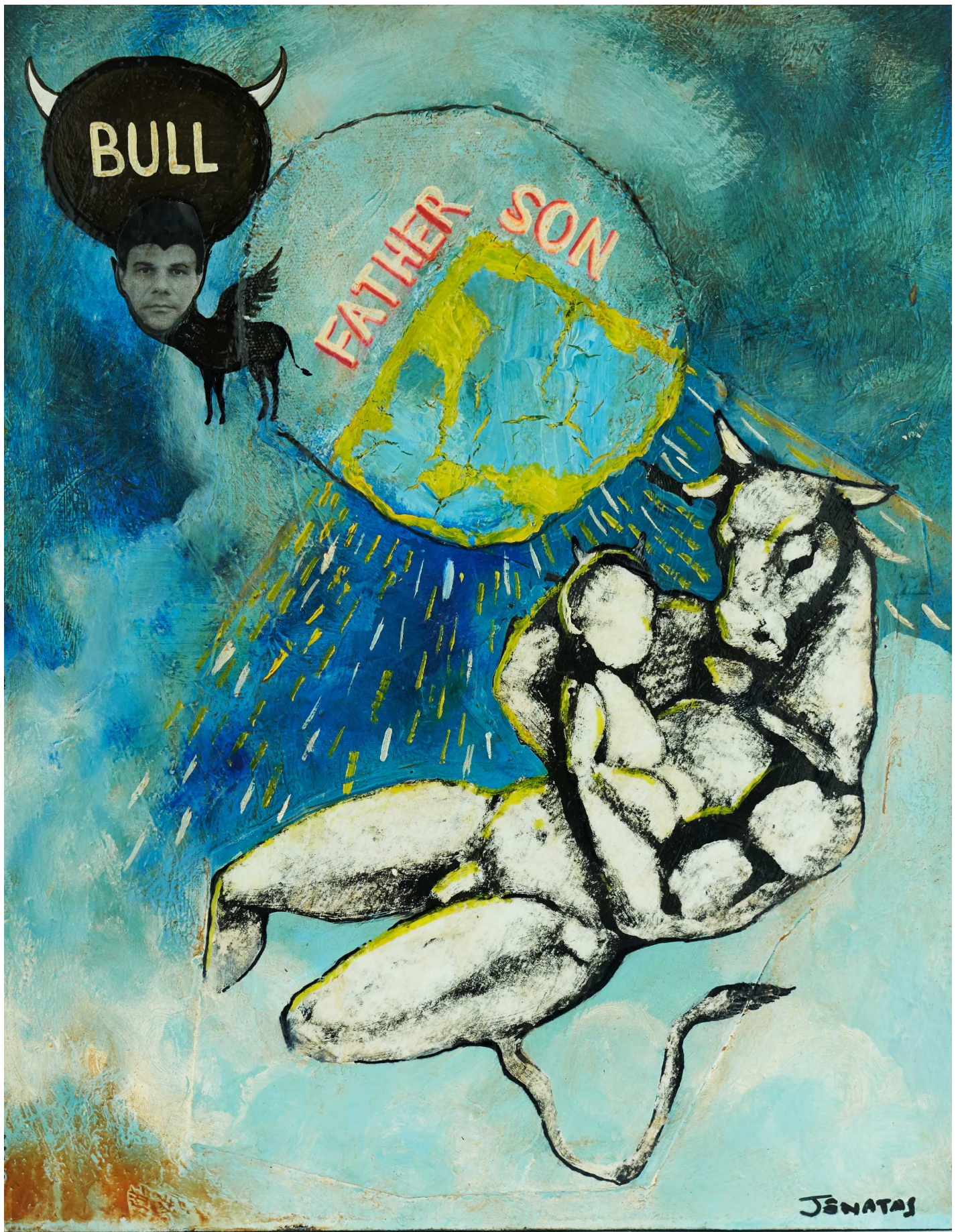


JONATAS

yes I Am Bull, Your Father-Son

11" x 14"

Mixed Media on Wood Panel



J. S. S.

I Am You Upside Down.

11 " x 14 "

Mixed Media on Wood Panel

I am you

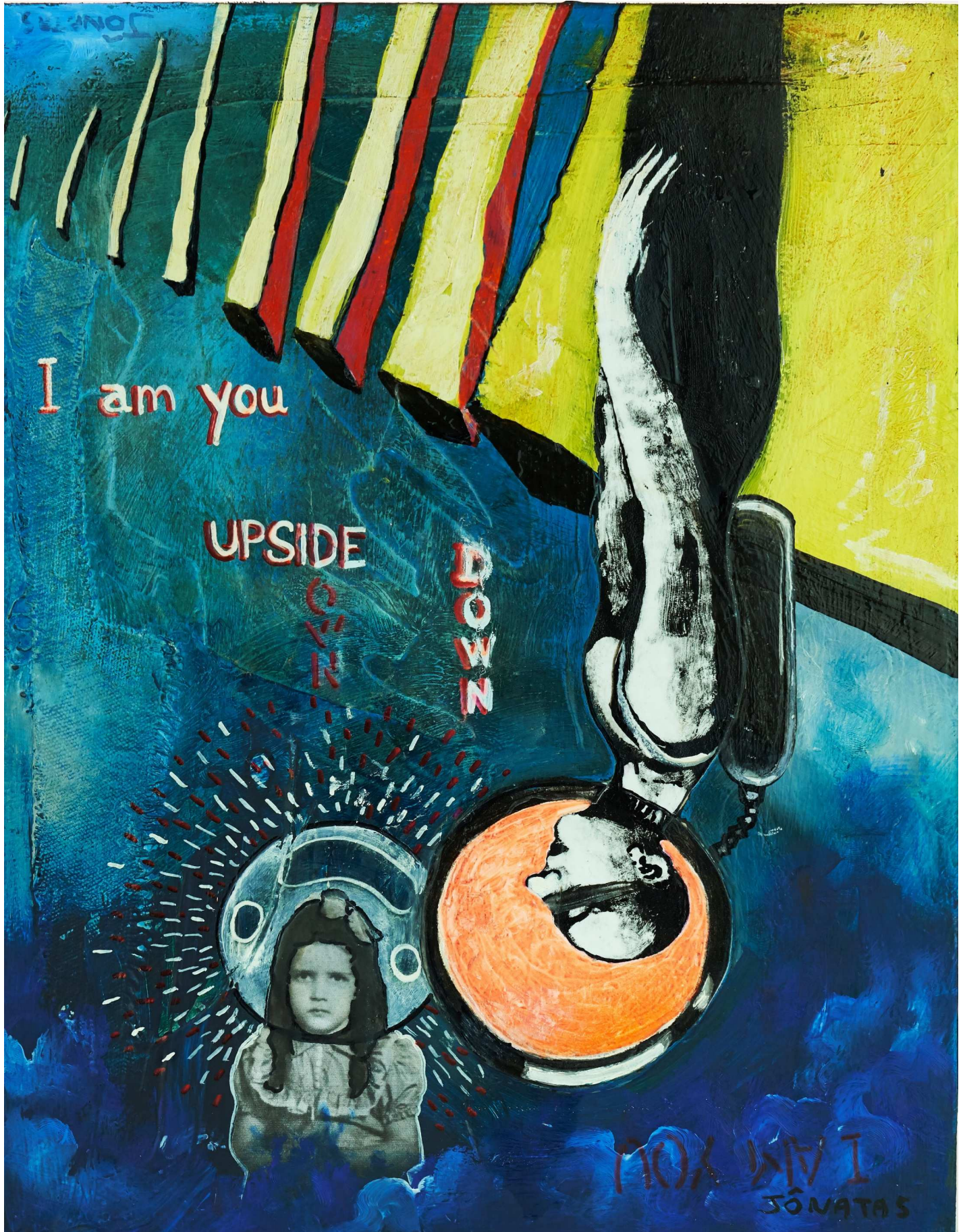
UPSIDE

DOWN

DOWN



I AM YOU
JONATHAN



The Innerverse of Jônatas

This Is The Future,
come Dance With Me.
but have no Expectations
after all, this is the 1492 Fashion Week...

and while I Am Lovely But Distant
Do Not Forget:
i am also The Local Giant
and this is my Blood Line!

To Go Or Not To Go? I always ask...
am I Too Amorous?
too much of a Voyeur?
at least Mama Knows Best!

1492 Never Ends here
Goya Saw It too
performing A Balancing Act everyday
yet, it just Can't Bring Me Down

for while You Sleep, I Dream
And I know Who Runs the World
yes I Am Bull, Your Father-Son
I Am You Upside Down.

"I have not only
observed the
randomness of life,
which often seems to
be the consequence
of arbitrary successes
and failures,
coincidences and
mismatches,
heartbreak and love,
birth and death, but I
also have seen the
repeated patterns"

~Jônatas

