

ODETOART

LANDSCAPES AND LIFE

THE ART OF RONNIE FORD



Cover:
Les Toits Oranges
60 x 80cm
Mixed media on wrapped canvas

BIOGRAPHY

Ronnie Ford was born in Dunoon, Scotland. He studied at the Glasgow School of Art from 1970 to 1974, graduating with BA (Hons). He gained his Art Teaching Certificate from Jordan Hill College of Education in Glasgow and taught art for 28 years in Scotland, England, Germany and later in Hong Kong. He held successful exhibitions of his work in each of those countries. In 2003 he returned to his hometown and became a full-time artist, establishing his working studio in Sandbank on the shores of the Holy Loch in Argyll. Working mainly from his Scottish studio, he exhibits his work in prestigious galleries worldwide.

Ronnie Ford's signature style of sculptural painting, inspired by his travels and influenced by his studies of Eastern and Western art, invites the viewer on a journey through timeless landscapes. He has had several sell-out exhibitions and has sold his work to private and public clients around the world. "I study the landscape, then distance myself from it physically and with time, in order to filter out unnecessary detail and capture the spirit of what I have seen on my canvases. As a result my paintings are often not representations of any particular place, but more of the impression that place has left upon me." His work features a highly textured surface and use of contrasting colours, both of which capture the landscape in a personal and evocative way. In addition, his 2003 Hong Kong exhibition was the central feature of the number one Cantopop star Sammie Cheng's MTV video.

Ronnie has used his success to benefit the Esther Benjamin Trust (Giving Children back their Childhood), which is a charity that has helped to lobby for the release of innocent children from jails in Nepal, and advocates the rescue of children from bonded labour in Indian circuses. The Esther Benjamin Trust also supplies care and education for street children, the under-privileged and socially shunned untouchables. Esther was a personal friend of Ronnie's and her husband, Philip Holmes, set up the charity in her memory.

Through the sale of his work, Ronnie has also helped other charities including the Society for Aids Care in Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Charity Auction. He also regularly donates paintings to help raise funds for POWER4Limbs, an organisation that provides replacement limbs for children and adults who have been injured by landmines. Other beneficiaries include the Yorkhill Children's Hospital, The MS Society, Princes Trust, Save the Children, Mary's Meals, Children's Liver Foundation, Booby Birds, and the Muir Maxwell Trust.

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

I was born in Dunoon, a small town in the west of Scotland - land of misty lochs, majestic mountains, bleak moors and soft green hills and meadows. Due to my father's ill health, the family relocated to Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) when I was around four years of age. Despite only staying for a couple of years, my early memories are full of vivid colours. I can recall the rich red earth, the dazzling textured blue of the jacaranda trees, the density of the wide blue sky above, the dazzling hues in the patterns of the indigenous peoples' robes against their smooth black skin. Playing amongst the elephant grass, chasing beautiful butterflies gave me a strong sense of the colours of nature - colours never to be experienced in Scotland. They are lastingly imprinted on my inner vision and I believe this is when I started to see in a different way.

Back in Scotland, at the age of six or seven, I used to come home from school each day, throw my bag in the door and shout, "Mum, I'm off to the woods". For the next two or three hours I got lost in my fantastical world of nature. I crawled along the ground, gazing through wild grasses to discover what the butterflies saw; I dipped my toes in the icy waters of the forest streams; I burrowed a maze of tunnels through the mass of rhododendron bushes and no matter where I was in the forest I always knew where to find a hiding place from the gamekeepers' clutches. One time I found myself sinking in a quagmire and only just managed to grab onto a wayward tree root and use all my strength to drag myself out of danger. If ever I felt a tinge of fear or loneliness, I climbed to the top of the trees to reign over the forest and the glimpse of a distant house reassured me that humanity still existed. Could this be why there is almost always a sign of human existence in my art works?

Spending all those hours immersed in nature did nothing for my school education. No one knew in those days that I was dyslexic (like many talented people). The term was not widely known. All I knew was that I was punished for abandoning my arithmetic to gaze at the Seurat painting on the calendar on the classroom wall - punished not once but again and again as the pages turned month by month to reveal what I now know to be Impressionist and Post-Impressionist images.

Then I met The Inspirational Teacher- Miss R Neil. A teacher ahead of her time, it was Miss Neil who found the key to my learning. Realising how visual stimulation was the way into my style of learning, and in particular my three-dimensional mind, she taught me through my love of art. She gave me a chapter of the book to read about Sir Edwin Landseer and only when I finished it was I to draw the horse in the illustration as part of my homework. When the tessellation unit came around, instead of explaining it in words, she gave me a blank wooden jewellery box to paint with a repeat pattern to cover the box without any obvious joins. I painted the back gold and tessellated the box with a rose motif. She was astounded. I felt on top of the world – valued for the very first time.

From then on I won all the art prizes going. Though schoolwork was hard (I loved Shakespeare, geography and chemistry), I was able to express myself for the first time in a medium that allowed me to achieve success. I was beginning to realise where my future lay. I had to become an art teacher and enable other budding talents to find the key to their success. In addition, while at school, I first started experimenting with texture. For my studies I had created sculpture and I had created paintings. Acrylic paints had just appeared and I was given a set to experiment with. It was then I discovered you could put things in the paint and they would stay put. I tried sand, gravel, pieces of paper, string and wood. It was through these early exercises that I started to envision how I could transform flat surfaces to give them volume and depth – not just literally but also figuratively.

This exhibition that you see here today is the culmination of all the various influences that I have received since my childhood. The bright colour blocks of my landscapes, the softness of the fields, the brilliant smooth azure of the skies and the startling hues of the plains – what I cannot try to convey about beauty in words, I try to do so with heartfelt emotion and profound humility in the presence of all the natural wonders I am constantly surrounded by.

Ronnie Ford

FOREWORD

It is with great pride and excitement that I present you with Ronnie Ford's first exhibition in Singapore, held here at Ode to Art Raffles City. If one ever makes the mistake of dismissing landscape painting as monotonous and uninspiring, one only needs to refer to Ronnie's paintings to dispel such a misconception. The waters and trees of his paintings are not just animate objects that collectively present a conventional beauty that can easily be overlooked; instead, they reflect astonishingly human qualities and emotions such as joy, contentment, sorrow and anticipation. His paintings can hence be perceived as magnificent projections of the modern desire to flee from the cacophony of everyday life into the calm, vast, meditative spaces of the natural world. I am always bowled away by the subtlety and vibrancy of Ronnie's paintings: since my first meeting with him several years back, I have been intensely struck by his ability to communicate emotions through silent works of art.

Through my conversations with Ronnie, I have learnt how his technique and style are extremely effective in conveying the unique personalities of the places that he visits. He once remarked in an interview that he rarely paints on location, but chooses to "look, photograph and sketch" his immediate impressions of the landscapes he traverses, before returning home to paint them in detail. As such, his paintings commemorate the authenticity and rawness of his most instinctive responses to these landscapes, and convey a sense of deep-seated intimacy with his subject matter. His art has also evolved to explore and articulate the epistemology of Asian art, perhaps due to the fact that he has lived and worked in Hong Kong for more than ten years. His paintings are bathed in iridescent light that brings them to life, and seem like images that are too whole and unblemished to be true. Yet, I do not feel that his paintings lack reality; for they replicate our fantasies of nature with the utmost sincerity. Rather, they bring to mind the sobering truth that all forms of life, however exquisite they may be, will eventually wither away.

The breathtaking crimson waters of Ronnie's waters and the rich ochres of his farmlands only remain timeless on his canvas. In line with Eastern philosophy, his paintings display acceptance of our ultimate mortality, but also seek to celebrate the occasional moments of beauty in our lives. Lovers of vibrant post-Impressionistic works will be enthralled by Ronnie's obvious commitment to the sentiment and style of the former, and contemporary art enthusiasts will appreciate his sensitive and refreshing take on a subject that has been studied by artists since the beginning of time. In an art world where concept has become more pivotal than technique, it is ironic that it has become so difficult to admire objects and subjects of unembellished simplicity. It is my opinion that Ronnie bucks the trend and proves that honest, understated works can too be uplifting and engaging.

I would like to express my gratitude to Ronnie for his friendship and for being a constant source of inspiration. Through his reinvention of landscape art, I have begun to re-contemplate my own relationship with nature and find qualities in it that I was previously impervious to. It is my sincerest hope that the viewer will too be moved by the grace and majesty of Ronnie's landscapes

Jazz Chong, Director
Ode To Art

AUTUMN MAJESTY

120 x 150 cm
Mixed media on canvas

The perfect symmetry of the solitary tree and its reflection, coupled with highly textured brushstrokes of stunning vermilion and yellow, truly make this painting one that depicts autumn majesty. One is humbled by the magnificence of the woodlands, but not turned off by the dazzling colours that Ford has used. As evidence of Ford's uncanny understanding of nature, the surface of water in this particular piece has been cleverly distorted to produce a dusky reflection of the scenery's palpable brilliance. The contrast between the hazy reflection of the tree and how it actually appears is an excellent technique employed by Ford in lending depth to the painting.







WIDE SKY OVER AUTUMN VINEYARDS I

50 x 100 cm

Mixed media on canvas, framed







PROVENCAL PERSPECTIVES

100 x 100 cm

Mixed media on wrapped canvas

In this kaleidoscopic conception of rustic Provence, Ford's ever-creative aesthetic vision is unleashed through the patches of blue, green, orange and dark crimson. It seems almost impossible to tell if it is sunrise, noon or dusk, as the time-neutral redness of the sky points to the idea that the allure of natural landscapes is unchanging, no matter what time of the day it is. In terms of the form and structure of his painting, Ford has presented a very stylised, minimalistic version of pastoral charm, choosing to let the straight lines of the farmland and gentle curves of the stream speak for themselves. His focus is not on painting every leaf and blade of grass with excruciating detail, but rather to summon the emotions of the viewer through his varied colour scheme.

ROUGE COQUELICOTS

122 x 152 cm
Mixed medium on canvas

ROUGE COQUELICOTS translates into “red poppies” in French. Indeed, this painting captures the arresting charm of red poppies that Ford emphasises through his palette and application of brushstrokes. Without a doubt, the most conspicuous elements of this painting must be the intense indigo and scarlet splashed across the fields. The dichotomy between the lavish blues and the milder, earthier tones that dominate the rest of the painting is perhaps an attempt to demonstrate the effects of light on the environment. Curiously enough, although purple is not a colour that comes to mind when one thinks of grass, the overall effect is neither inelegant nor outlandish. Rather, the complementary colours only serve to emphasise the capricious personality of Mother Nature: no single landscape can look perennially the same. Even a blade of grass never remains constant, and Ford uses his affinity for colour to convey this. In this particular scene, one cannot be sure if it is day or night, as Ford’s palette accentuates the immutability of nature’s splendour.









GOLDEN HARVEST

120 x 150cm

Mixed media on wrapped canvas

LES TOITS ORANGES

60 x 80 cm

Mixed media on wrapped canvas

Ford has always sought to capture the scintillating charm of natural landscapes through the use of his palette, and this piece is proof of his artistic creed. The cerulean blue sky is mirrored perfectly in the still waters, with the orange roofs and slender pine trees providing pops of colour amidst the otherwise vast spaces of colour. This is a scene that is typical of the Côte de Beauté (Coast of Beauty) in France, and Ford emphasises the serenity of the seaside through his smooth, even brushwork. He manages to transform the canvas into a frictionless surface while paying the utmost attention to detail, as evidenced by the light falling on the blades of grass outside the houses. The purity of his style actualises the simple, quiet joy of spending a day at the beach, surrounded by nature in its most pristine state.





CHANSON D'ETE

120 x 150cm
Mixed media on wrapped canvas









RHYTHMS OF THE LAND

50 x 70 cm

Mixed Media on Wrapped Canvas

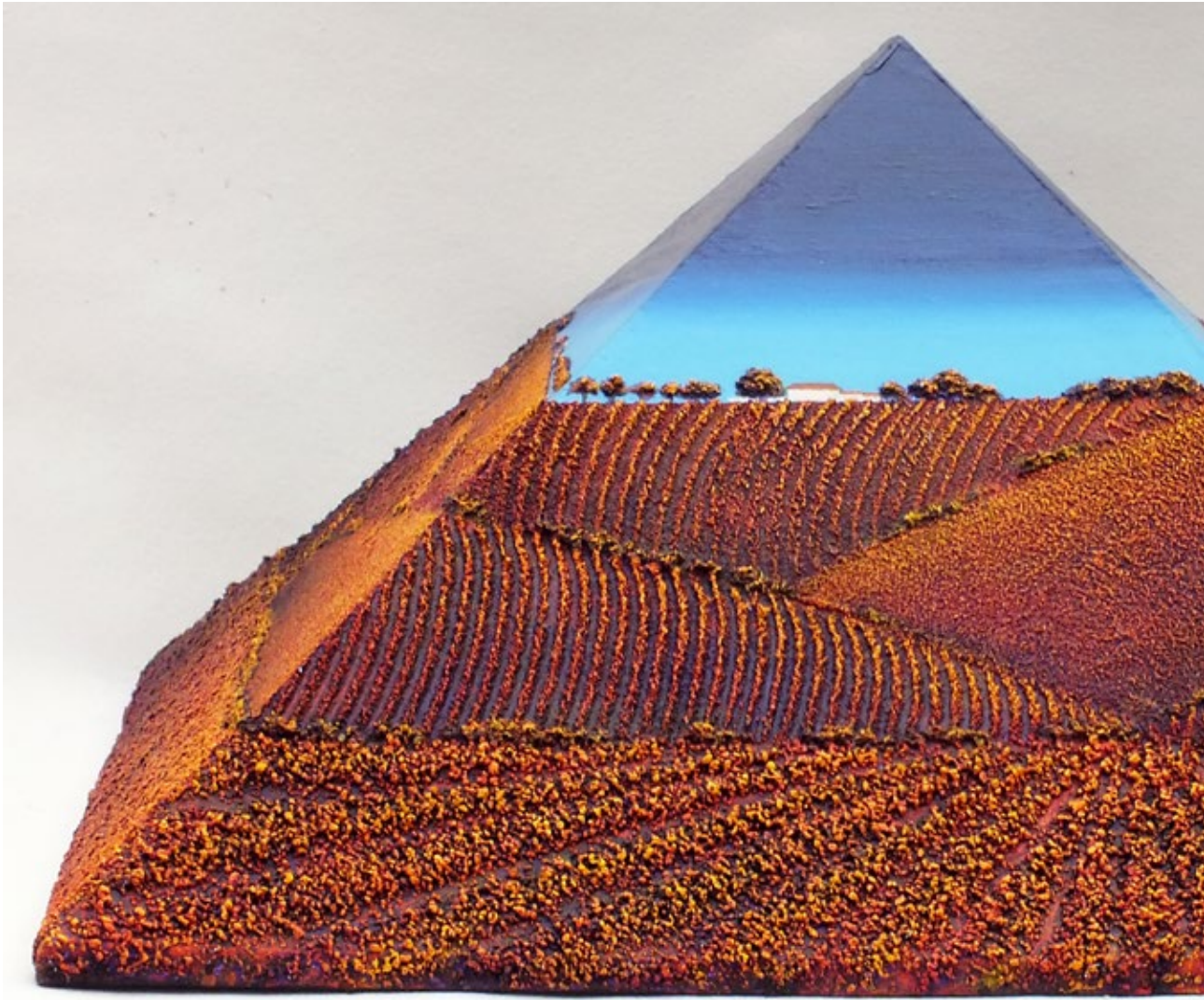
Ford infuses *RHYTHMS OF THE LAND* with an almost cinematic sensibility that recalls the films of Akira Kurosawa. By rolling out a carpet of breathtaking lavender blooms in their full glory, Ford cajoles the viewer to set his or her eyes on the endless green and golden fields of Provence in France. The leaves of the trees and the flower petals in the foreground have been painted with heavy impasto to give them lifelike texture, a technique that is not applied on objects that are further from the viewer's line of sight. Ford's deft brushwork reveals the rhythmic geometry of the bucolic setting, thus explaining the title of this piece. More importantly, the almost three-dimensional foreground introduces depth to the otherwise flat canvas, and simulates the visual experience of actually standing within a lavender field, admiring the blocks of splendid colours that define the French countryside.

REVERIES

120 x 150cm
Mixed media on wrapped canvas









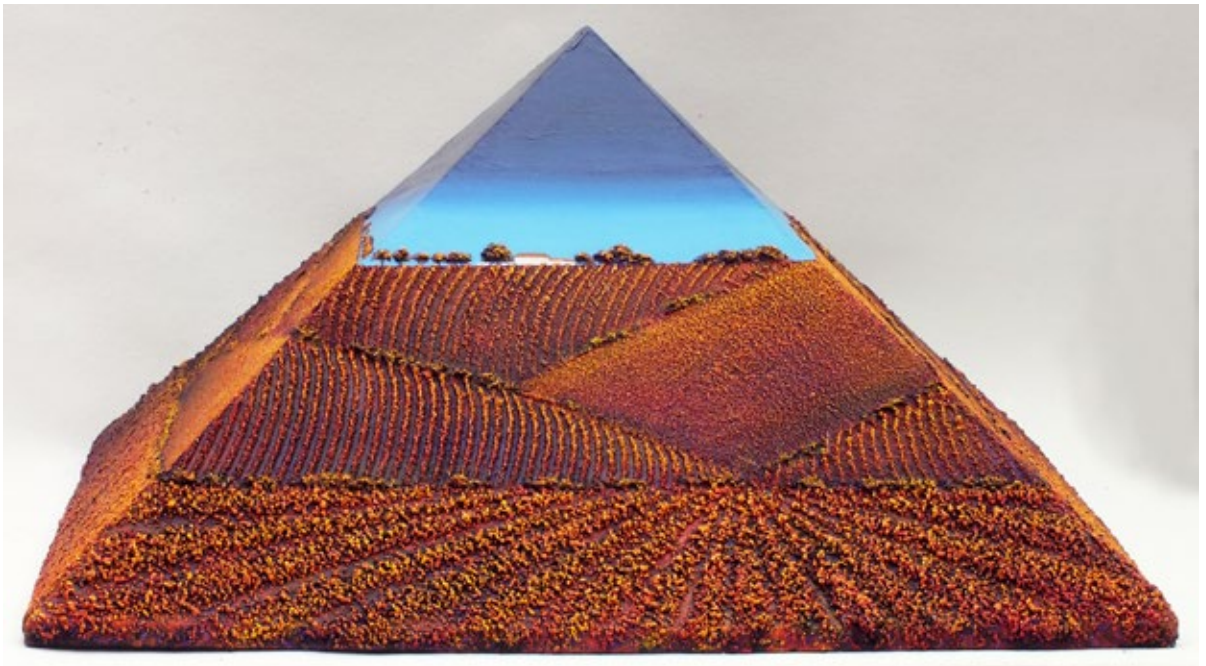
JOUR ET NUIT

TIMESCAPE ON PYRAMID (DUSK)

40 x 40 x 23cm
Mixed media on wrapped canvas



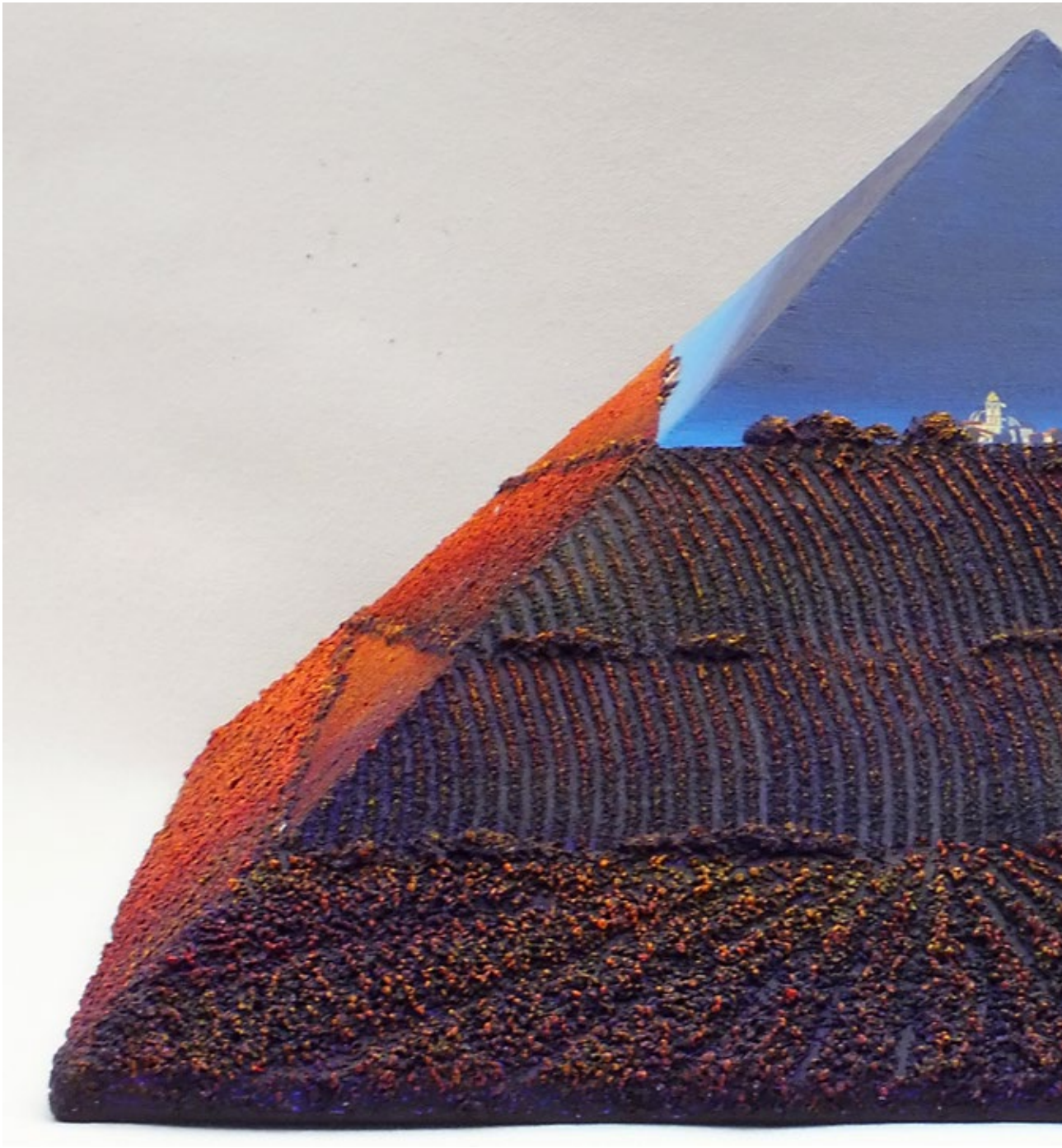
JOUR ET NUIT TIMESCAPE ON PYRAMID (DUSK)



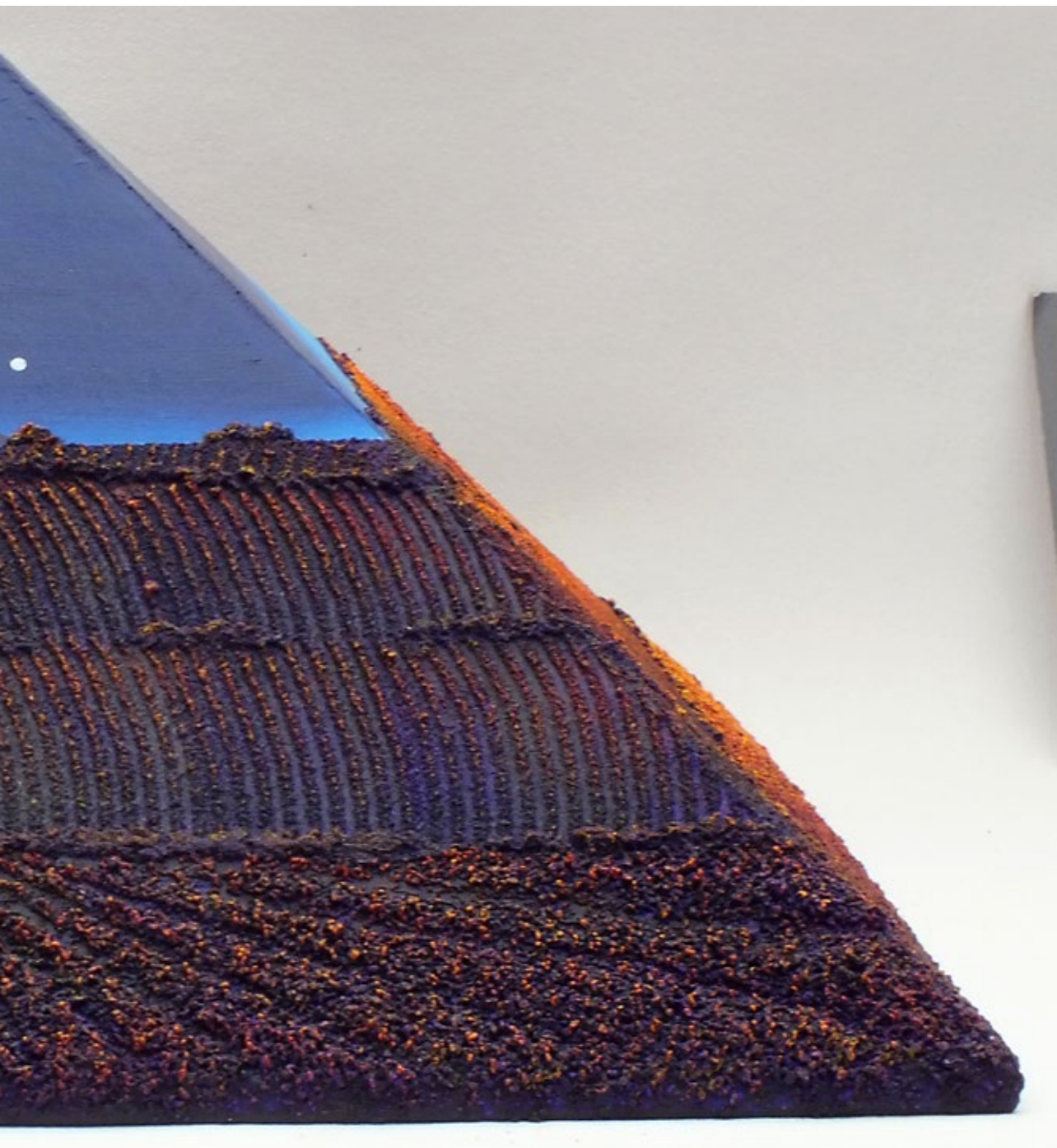
JOUR ET NUIT

JOUR ET NUIT TIMESCAPE ON PYRAMID (DAY)

40 x 40 x 23cm
Mixed media on wrapped canvas



JOUR ET NUIT TIMESCAPE ON PYRAMID (NIGHT)







TAPESTRY IN PINK AND BLUE

60 x 80 cm

Mixed media on wrapped canvas

It has become increasingly ubiquitous to see agriculturists planting meadows of wild flowers in France, and the subject matter of this piece was inspired by one such meadow near Ford's second home in Charente-Maritime. The word "tapestry" in the title of the piece bears connotations of a finely woven, colourful length of fabric. Indeed, the countless blossoms dappling the expanse of emerald seem as if they have been neatly stitched onto a lush brocaded blanket. Once again, the post-Impressionist influence on Ford's work is made visible through the hybridisation of warm and cool colours, yielding far more vivid tones than would have been possible through the mixing of paint. The azure sky and sea appear as luminous strips in the distance, casting their gentle light down upon the field and making the flowers seem resplendent.

OLIVIERS AU BORD DE LA MER

50 x 100 cm

Mixed media on wrapped canvas



Ford said of *OLIVIERS AU BORD DE LA MER*: "I love to play with unusual perspectives as in this painting, looking over the top of the nearby hill and down onto the olive grove beyond, then sending the eye into the distant sea and mountains, using composition and colour to guide the eye and soul on its journey." His poetic vision comes to life through the near-faultless symmetry of the hill emblazoned in apricot and dark green, split into solid halves through the positioning of the two thin trees in the centre of the canvas. Ford seems to pay tribute to the neat patterns of the cosmic order through his rows of trees, which stretch towards an infinity of turquoise waves. Through this contrast in colour, he highlights the fact that both earth and water are intimately intertwined to give nature its unsullied beauty.





OVERLOOKING COLLIOURES

120X150CM

MIXED MEDIA ON WRAPPED CANVAS



PARADIS PROVENCAL

122 x 152 cm

Mixed media on wrapped canvas

PARADIS PROVENCAL was the result of inspiration from a musical composition by 21-year-old David Hueger, a musician based in Berlin. As with *Rhythms of the Land*, the subject matter of this painting is the growth of lavender in springtime. Here, the flowers have been painted with a light indigo shade that evokes the light sweetness of their scent, and emphasises the refreshing coolness of spring. The rows of lavender stretch towards the horizon, where one can catch a faint glimpse of a single yellow house.

This solitary abode, surrounded by the undulating earth, perhaps symbolises the smallness of the individual in the majestic presence of unblemished nature. In the distance, a single belt of blazing yellow crops separates the lavender from a range of purple mountains that glow under the sky like rough diamonds. The ruggedness of Ford's purple peaks is made to look even more dramatic because of the precise lines that mark the flourishing of the lavender, which have been planted by human hands. This subtle touch demonstrates Ford's hopeful vision of humanity and nature co-existing in harmony.









SKY
REFLECTS
ON THE
MORNING
DEW

50x70cm

Mixed media on wrapped canvas





FLEURS SAUVAGES, TALMONT

60 x 80cm
Mixed media on wrapped canvas



THROUGH THE LONG GRASS

60 x 80 cm

Mixed media on canvas

The style of this piece is a marked departure from Ford's other works, as the composition has been made from the perspective of a butterfly "lying low in the field and gazing through the long grasses to the signs of humanity beyond". The blurry blades of grass with the speckles of red suggest the motion of the butterfly flitting quickly through the meadow, perceiving the landscape that lies ahead of it. Compared to Ford's other paintings, *THROUGH THE LONG GRASS* is stylistically more Impressionistic and employs an unusual visual angle to depict movement as a key element of the human experience. While many people might think that grass is a characterless subject matter to focus on, Ford has successfully given it complexity and dynamism. The streaks of black and white amidst the grass give it a limpid appearance, transforming it into a shimmering pool of green that never stops moving.







WIDE SKY OVER AUTUMN VINEYARDS 2

50 x 100 cm

Mixed media on canvas, framed







SPRINGTIME, CHARENTE

60 x 80 cm

Mixed media on wrapped canvas

Spring is a season that is commonly associated with the bold radiance of new life that is born or revived after a sepulchral, wintery spell of desolation. In this painting, Ford expresses his love for springtime through the depiction of vibrant yellow crops that burgeon rapidly across the land, even as the last mounds of snow continue to thaw from the trees. Snaking across the canvas is a two-lined track that leads to a red-and-blue farmhouse, the latter of which perhaps embodies the fresh brightness that characterises spring. This particular piece is emotionally powerful because of the raw honesty of its subject matter: instead of painting a variety of animals and plants in spring, Ford chooses to concentrate on the multitude of growing life that is implied through the immense spaces of the landscape, which appear almost incandescent in the spring sun.





LES PREMIERES FLEURS DE L'ETE

50 x 50cm
Mixed media on wrapped canvas

TREES
EMBRACE
THE
MEADOW'S
GLORY

100 x 100cm
Mixed media on wrapped canvas





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RONNIE FORD