



Jess de Silva
Things we do



things we do

Things we do

In the lockdown of 2020 Jess de Zilva began creating her new body of work titled *Things we do*. Borne out of the pandemic experience it describes facets of emotional life as we navigate through the chaos of it.

Jess de Zilva takes our confusion and doubt and mirrors them back at us as painted stories.

In her oil paintings she combines figures' poses and expressions, backdrops and symbolic objects, creating allegories that leave us wondering and pondering.

De Zilva's style is best described as psychological realism. *"I'm interested in what underpins our actions and thoughts, how context influences us. My paintings thus can be visually dreamlike, but the feelings they express are real. I paint in a realist manner to bring a sense of reality and seriousness to a subject that cannot be seen nor touched and is difficult to describe."*

The painted figures in her works are portraits of real people yet the stories are not about specific individuals; Jess hopes there is a piece of everyone reflected in her works.



ONE OF THOSE DAYS

„Greatly inspired by Valentin de Boulogne’s version of ‚the last supper’ I had been plotting a painting for over a year. It was going to be a painting, not of the last supper, but of the early morning after the party.

Then the pandemic and the first lockdown hit. I realized I would not be able to execute the idea as I had planned and so ‚the morning after’ morphed into this painting I named ‚one of those days.’“

Not being able to work with models, all the protagonists in this painting are one and the same person. It still deals with how we are with our fellow people, the breakdown of social rules, behaviour otherwise not laid bare and thresholds being lowered, except in this painting it has turned inwards. How do we deal with ourselves when being faced and maybe even stuck with ourselves? The many facets of our personality come out to play; the good, the bad and the ugly.

One of those days is one of the many indistinguishable days stuck in four walls with one’s self.



one of those days / oil on linen / 140cm x 85cm

PLANTING FOR 2021

"The past months have given rise to much good as well as ugliness. There are ruins and wounds of so many kinds everywhere. All we can do is our best. We can learn from our experiences and look ahead. We can make something new, something good, maybe even something better from it.

We haven't yet arrived where young shoots are growing. They still are to poke their heads out. But it is time to plan. We ought to be planting now.

When the shoots grow, they will be delicate and in need of much care, patience and vision. Theirs is the most difficult task of transforming the shit they grow from."

October 2020



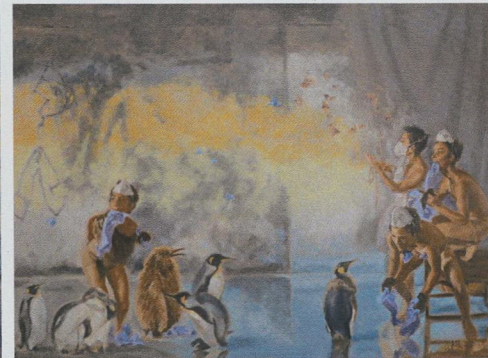
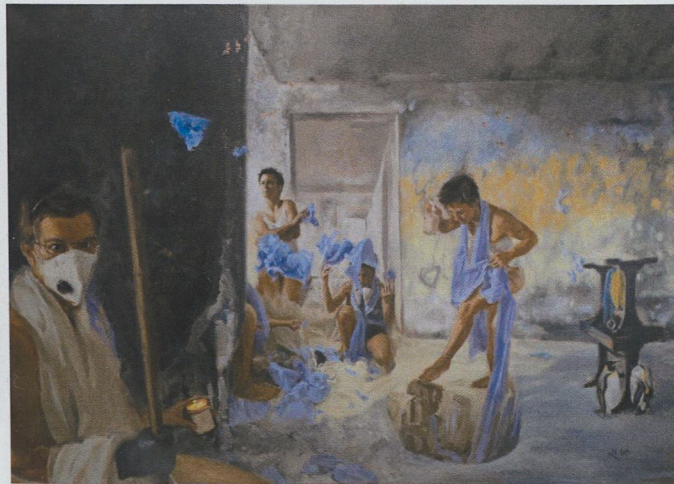
planting for 2021 / oil on canvas / 85cm x 85cm

THINGS WE DO

The triptych describes how the absurd has entered reality. It has infiltrated our lives. Things don't make sense. We struggle as we are left figuring out how to live. Hope is stacked up against fear and threats, truth has become a plural, love and death are closer than ever. We are lonely yet needing of more space, some find support in peculiar actions and places. In chaos we are lost and so we search. We try, step lightly, observe, examine, wonder, hide, threaten, protect, defend and hurt. The things we do externally and internally have never been so ambivalent.

Yet the triptych offers openings; into obscure space where the butterflies go, along the path of the penguins, via the water behind closed curtains, through doorways and halls deeper into the painting, down a hole she tip toes across, and maybe there is still an exit upstairs? The last path is to step out to join the viewer and enter another world altogether.

Each panel of the triptych has it's own feel while the scenes spill over into each other.



things we do (triptych) / oil on linen / 295cm x 85cm

The centrepiece *beyond the gate* measures 120cm in width. Its pictorial space is guarded by a life-sized figure wearing a mask, holding a stick and a candle. The figure is reminiscent of a shepherd taking care of its sheep, the light emitting from the candle brings up thoughts of rituals and hope. Is access being granted? We do not know but we can watch from here.



beyond the gate / oil on linen / 120cm x 85cm

The right panel *offerings for the penguin king* is smaller and focuses on the absurd. Things don't make sense here either. Odd behavior becomes ritual when there is nothing else to hold on to.

In all of the paintings one and the same figure is featured in all ten roles, which makes the paintings even more odd. Typical for de Zilva's paintings, there is that element of portraiture yet the work is not about her. The figures in her paintings are protagonists. She combines their poses, expressions, the settings and symbolic objects to express the allegories of what goes on in our psyche. The people she portrays are placeholders for any one of us.

"I consider my paintings psychological realism as I paint in a realist fashion and use traditional portraiture to describe psychological and intimate internal experiences."



offerings for the penguin king / oil on linen / 85cm x 65cm

They come and go is the left panel. There are more butterflies and there is more blue material flying about, but the scene is quiet and nearly void of people. Someone is sitting behind a wall.

"This panel focuses on thoughts, space, dreams and desires," the artist says. *"I left the painting very open, obscure and hazy, aiming to keep my own voice down for the observers' mind to speak. The painting deals with personal space, escapism, thinking, maybe wanting to fly away with the butterflies or wondering if there are other paths to be taken."*

The painting also reminds us of the empty streets and loneliness of the time, and in doing so of the contrasting wishes of others for silence.

Things we do (triptych) is painted oil on linen and measures 295cm x 85cm. The centrepiece is 120cm x 85cm. The side panels are both 85cm x 65cm.



they come and go / oil on linen / 85cm x 65 cm

on silence





not far, I promise / oil on linen / 85cm x 65 cm



where the butterflies go / oil on linen / 85cm x 65 cm



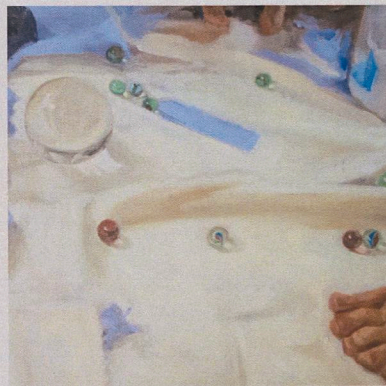
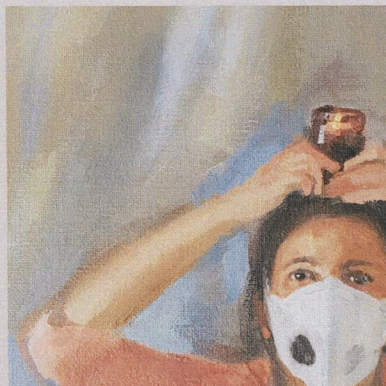
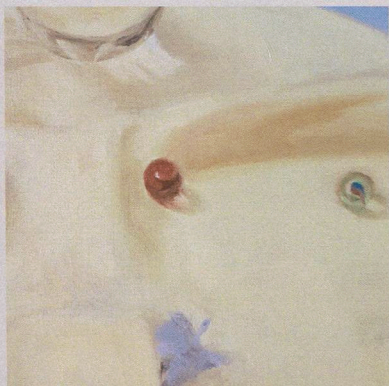
a million different reasons / oil on linen / 85cm x 65 cm



drunk on memories / oil on linen / 85cm x 65 cm

REARRANGEMENT REQUIRED

Rearrangement required is designed and composed like a still life. It brings together objects of pandemic living such as masks, hand gel, disinfectant washing powder and tissue paper. We have all become familiar with these items, they have gained their own meaning to us. Thus tissues may imply attempts at keeping areas clean from virus or worries about runny noses having graver implications than they ever had. The crystal ball symbolises possible future outcomes while marbles may be crumbs of entertainment and joy. There needs to be hope and there always needs to be a way out of a painting. *Rearrangement required* has been equipped with the candle I read as the light at the end of the tunnel, that has taken a solid place in my pandemic paintings.



"Rearrangement required is one of the paintings that I have assigned to *the things we do* series, created from around April 2020 and during lockdown into 2021. No models were available and there was nowhere else to go either, so everything took place in the house and studio and I modelled for myself.

There was a certain amount of mess and chaos that arrived with these projects and at times it felt a little like a bizarre fetish, arranging objects that were signs of the sad truth of the time and rummaging through all of it barely clothed. The architectural element of the composition is based on a found image of an old slaughter house in Shanghai. It suited the narrative. I do find it all fits in with the theme *things we do*. The things we did and things we thought, the confusion, desires and feeling of loss are probably all hidden somewhere in those actions and images, at least in a symbolic way. We live with rituals every day, be it from those that keep us fed and washed to those that give us a sense of meaning in life. On this trajectory the works I am currently planning are loosely based on the idea of rituals." (May 2021)



rearrangement required / oil on linen / 85cm x85cm

Redrawing boundaries, making peace and our longing for victory

Artist's work created during lockdown illustrates where we currently are in the pandemic

The restrictions have been lifted but Covid19 is still here. With the Delta variant sweeping through the country causing a steep increase in infections, a 'ping-demic' telling people to isolate at home, what was referred to as freedom makes us once again think about our boundaries and our understanding of freedom, peace and victory.

Two paintings *perimeter* and *a departure* created by artist Jess de Zilva during lockdown illustrate for the second time in this pandemic where we are, right now.

Perimeter refers to its use in security for protection. It questions where we draw boundaries, how far we go to protect ourselves, our loved ones and others. What happens when the perimeter is penetrated? The pandemic has highlighted that everybody's actions and non-actions affect everyone else.

A departure is symbolic for moving timidly from a devastated and restricted place into an unknown future. The figure holds up two fingers and the artist leaves us wondering if the sign is for victory, for a peace and a freedom that needs to be re-established, or all of the above.

"I created these paintings last year in response to the chaotic life and hopes of that moment in time. I didn't expect them to become quite so relevant again now"

(Taken from press release 26/07/2021)

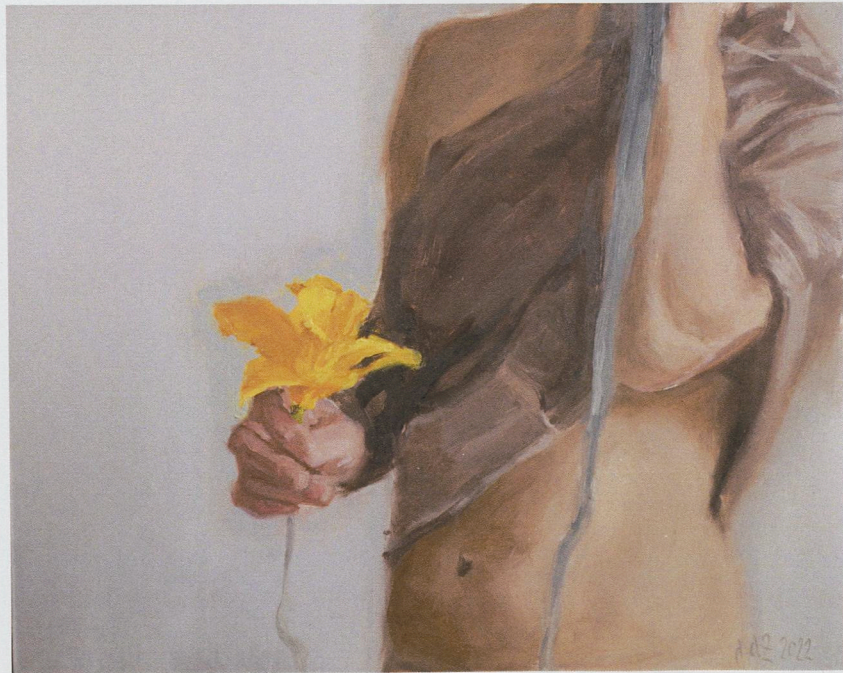




perimeter / oil on linen / 75cm x 85cm



a departure / oil on linen / 75cm x 85cm



any one of those games / oil on aluminium / 25.5cm x 20.4cm

the rite of spring

Things we do continues in a second part with the working title *the rite of spring*.

This is where we move ahead. With one eye on the past and moments of contemplation we carry our heads high and battle for spring. Now other people have entered the stage, daffodils are blossoming, we stretch, we reach out, investigate, dance, aim to fly and communicate.



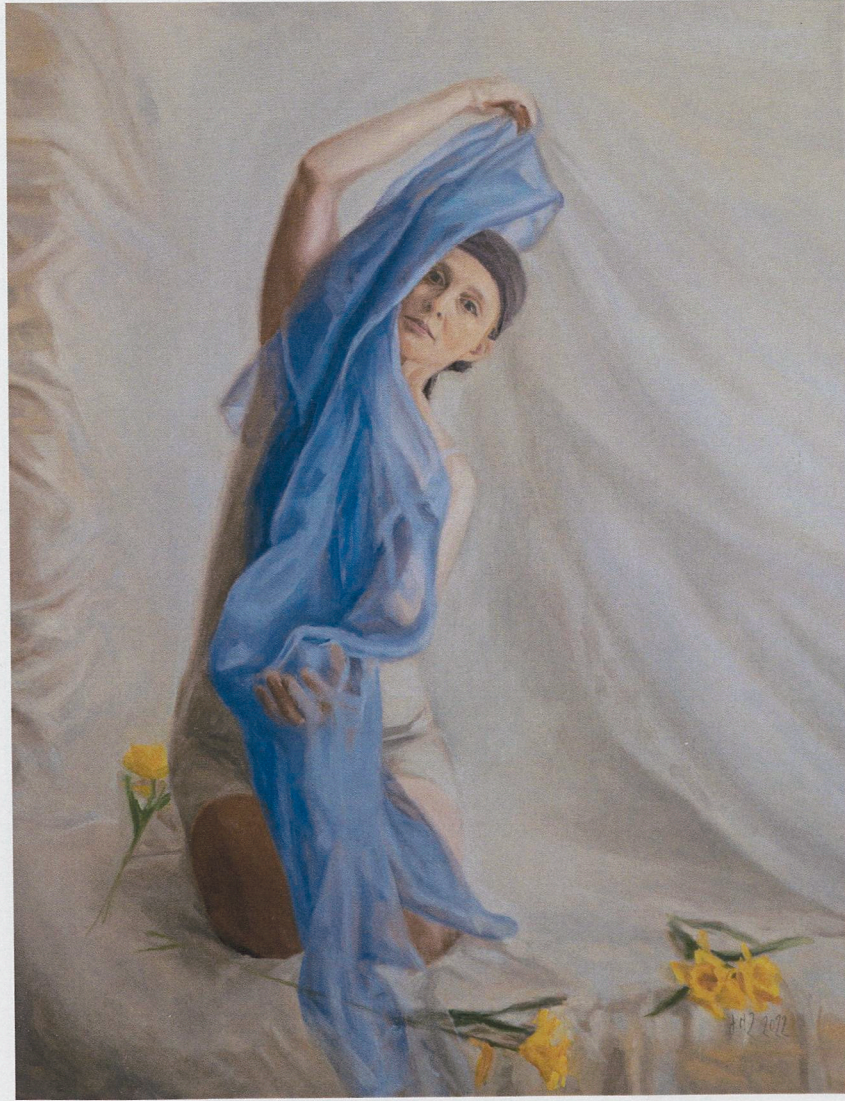
opening channels / oil on linen / 85cm x 75cm



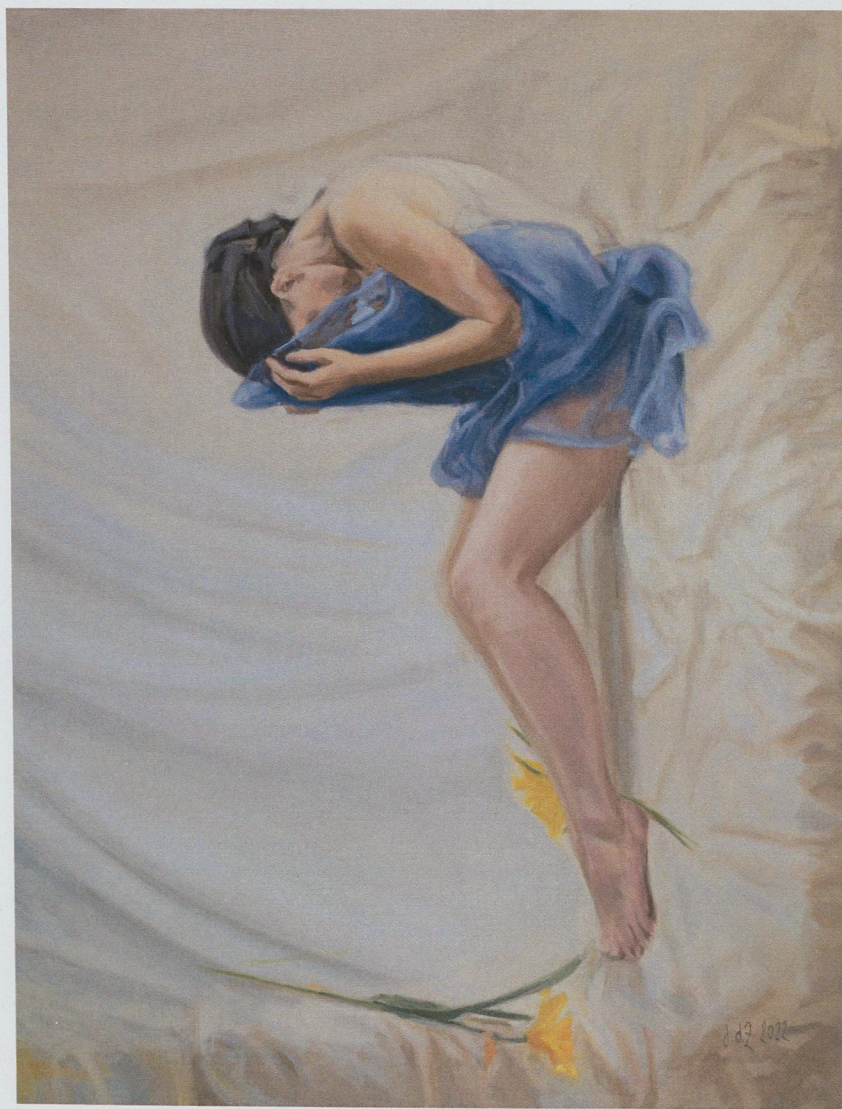
at least along one dimension / oil on linen / 85cm x 75cm



five to square a circle / oil on linen / 85cm x 85cm



a thousand different ways / oil on linen / 65cm x 85cm



time to get a good view / oil on linen / 65cm x 85cm

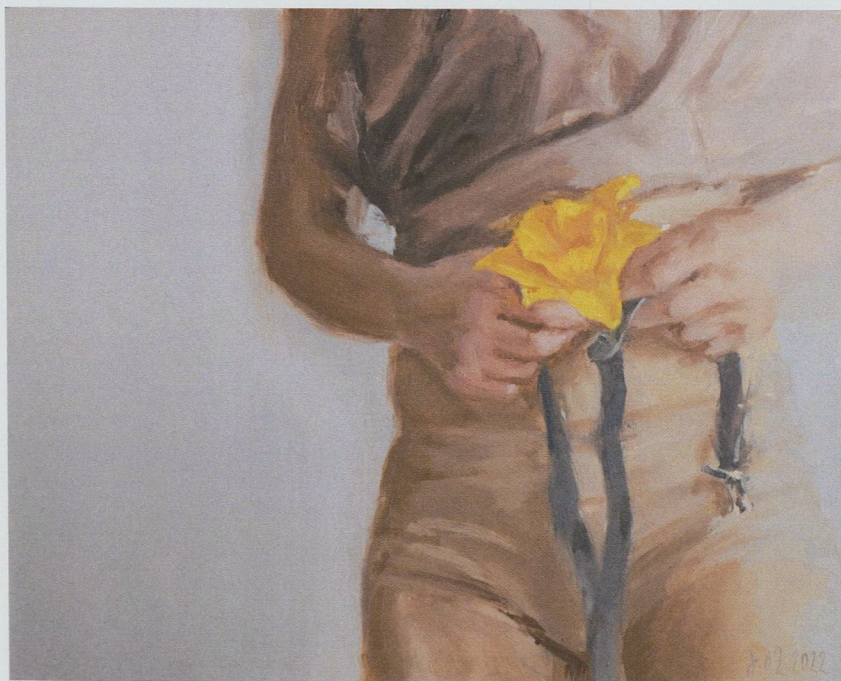
BIO

Jess de Zilva is a London based painter of psychological allegories.

She was born in London where she spent her early years with her Sri Lankan father, Liechtensteiner mother and her siblings. As the family divided, her life continued in Liechtenstein and in Switzerland where she completed her foundation art studies.

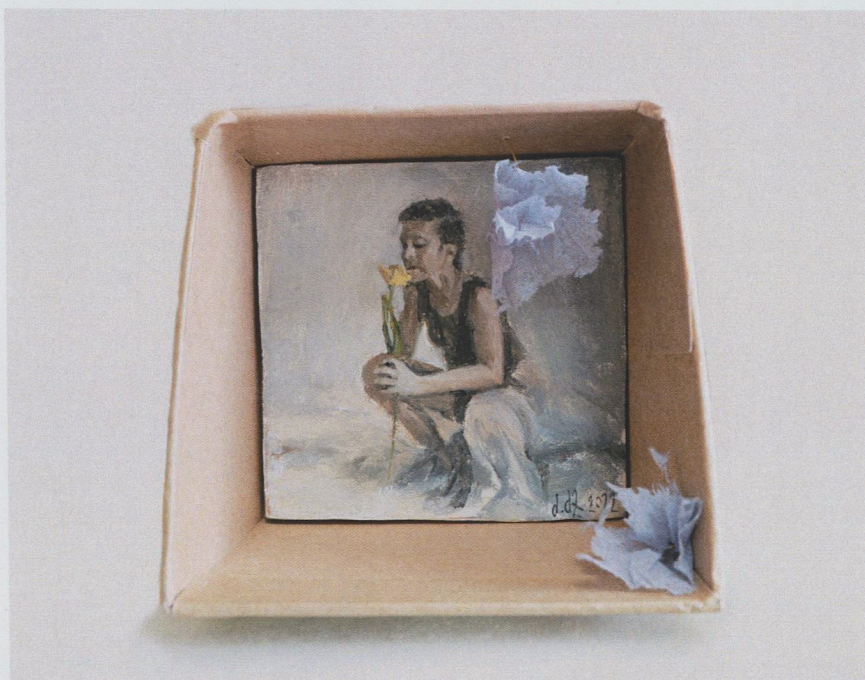
In 2001 Jess returned to London to study Fine Art at Camberwell College of Arts, then took a break from the art world to re-evaluate where she was heading. She earned a living painting and decorating and studied specialist paint effects & faux painting, all the while learning a great deal about materials and processes. In 2015 she began focusing on classical painting methods and techniques, including portrait painting, and studied at the Sarum Studio, Atelier of Fine Art, in Salisbury under the tutelage of Nicholas Beer.

Jess has evolved into a realist painter whose psychological allegories bring traditional portraiture into magical scenes.



beginning to feel a lot like I'll wait / oil on aluminium / 25.5cm x 20.4cm





no one deigned to notice / mixed media / 7,5cm x 7cm x 5,5cm



Jess de Zilva

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