

# NKa

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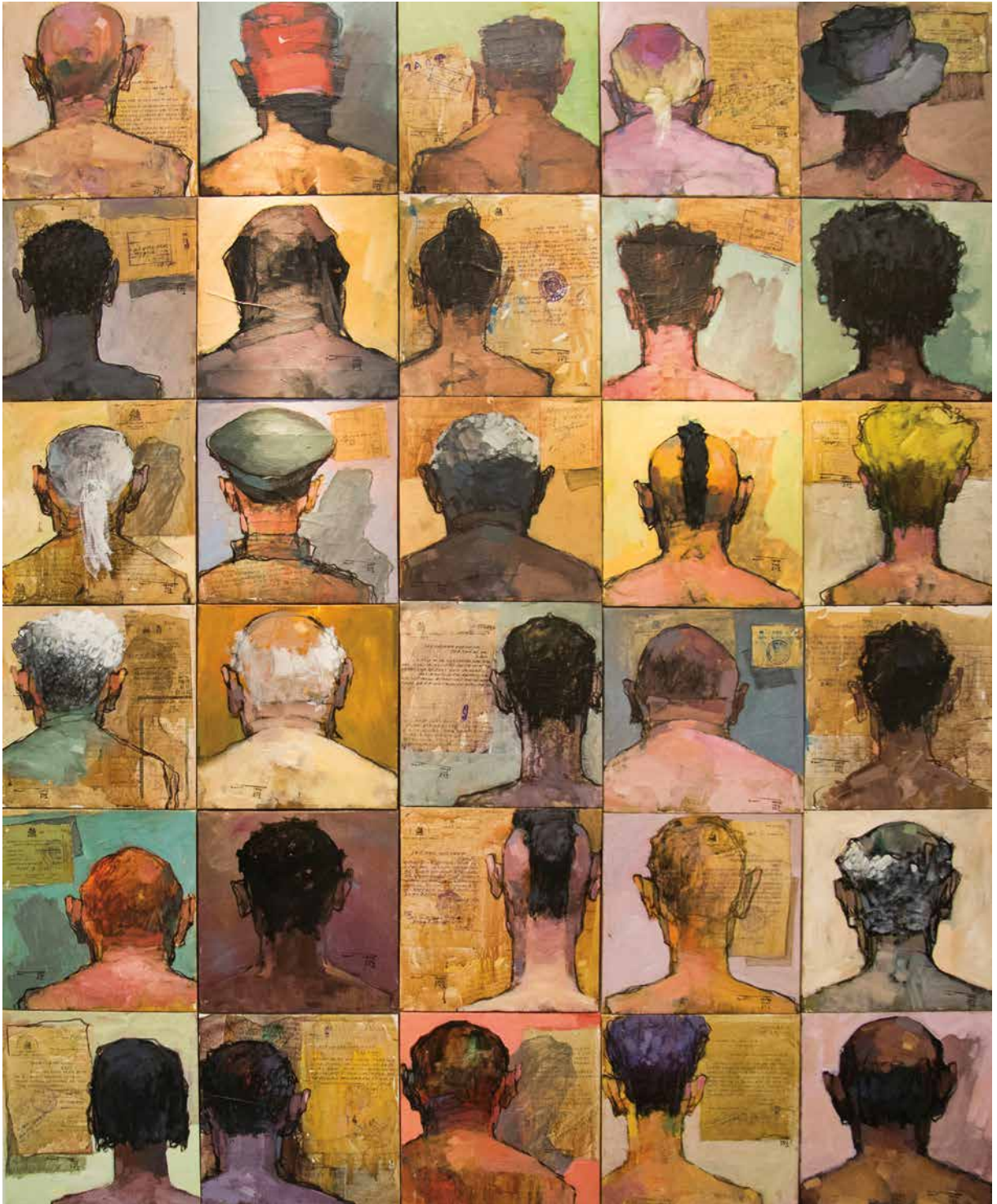
# Monumental Bodies

## The Work of Dawit Abebe

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I was introduced to the Ethiopian artist Dawit Abebe's work through his *Jerba* paintings, an Amharic word that means "back" or "background." A series of mixed media and acrylic paintings of different sizes, *Jerba* was first exhibited at Lela Gallery in Addis Ababa in 2015. Visually striking images—full-sized and miniature, rhythmical and prosaic, indecent and garbed—loomed in the gallery space. Small panels of *jerbas* also lined up like a chessboard grid, each color complementing the next. Characteristically, thick brushstrokes permeated the canvases, and *jerbas* of all kinds emerged in different shapes. For example, a *jerba* just above the neck wore a hat evocative of the textures of everyday life. Another panel presented an aged *jerba*, reminding viewers of the harsh impositions that attend old age. Throughout the series, Abebe deploys color in an arresting way.

The evocative nature of the compositions adds a conceptual component to the semi-realistic renditions of human form. For instance, memory and nostalgia are conjured up by a *jerba* that is magnificently crowned. The Lion of Judah is painted in the middle of the crown, and the figure is adorned with sparkling gems. Reflective of the complexities of the present, this particular image depicts a contemporary culture that reflexively recovers the past to reflect on a tumultuous and uncertain present.



Dawit Abebe, *Background 1*, 2014. Acrylic and collage on canvas, 33 x 33 cm. © the artist



No. 2 Background 20, 2015. Acrylic and collage on canvas, 130 x 160cm. © the artist



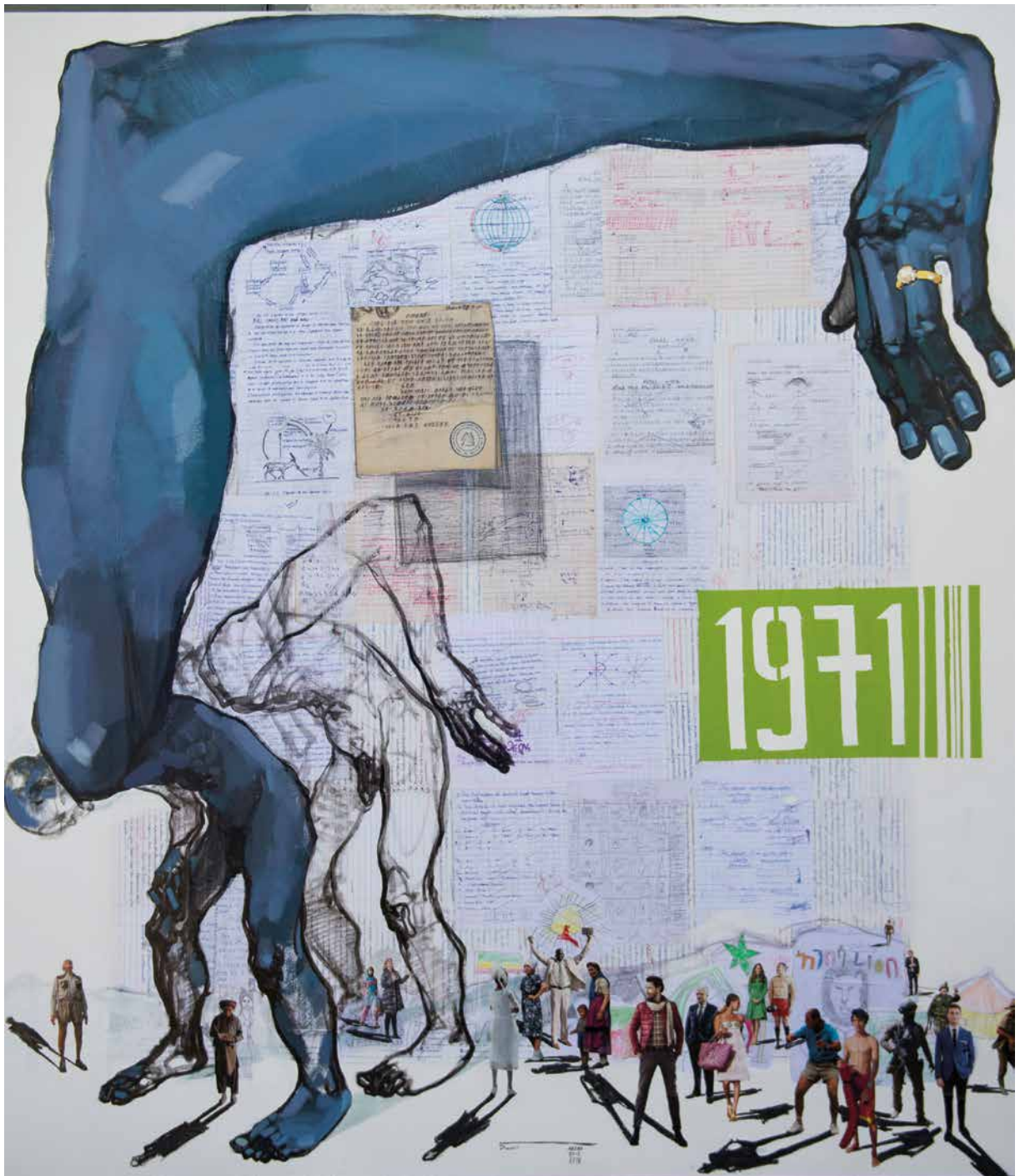
No. 2 Background 38, 2016. Acrylic and collage on canvas, 200 x 140 cm. © the artist



No. 2 Background 36, 2016. Acrylic and collage on canvas, 200 x 140 cm. © the artist

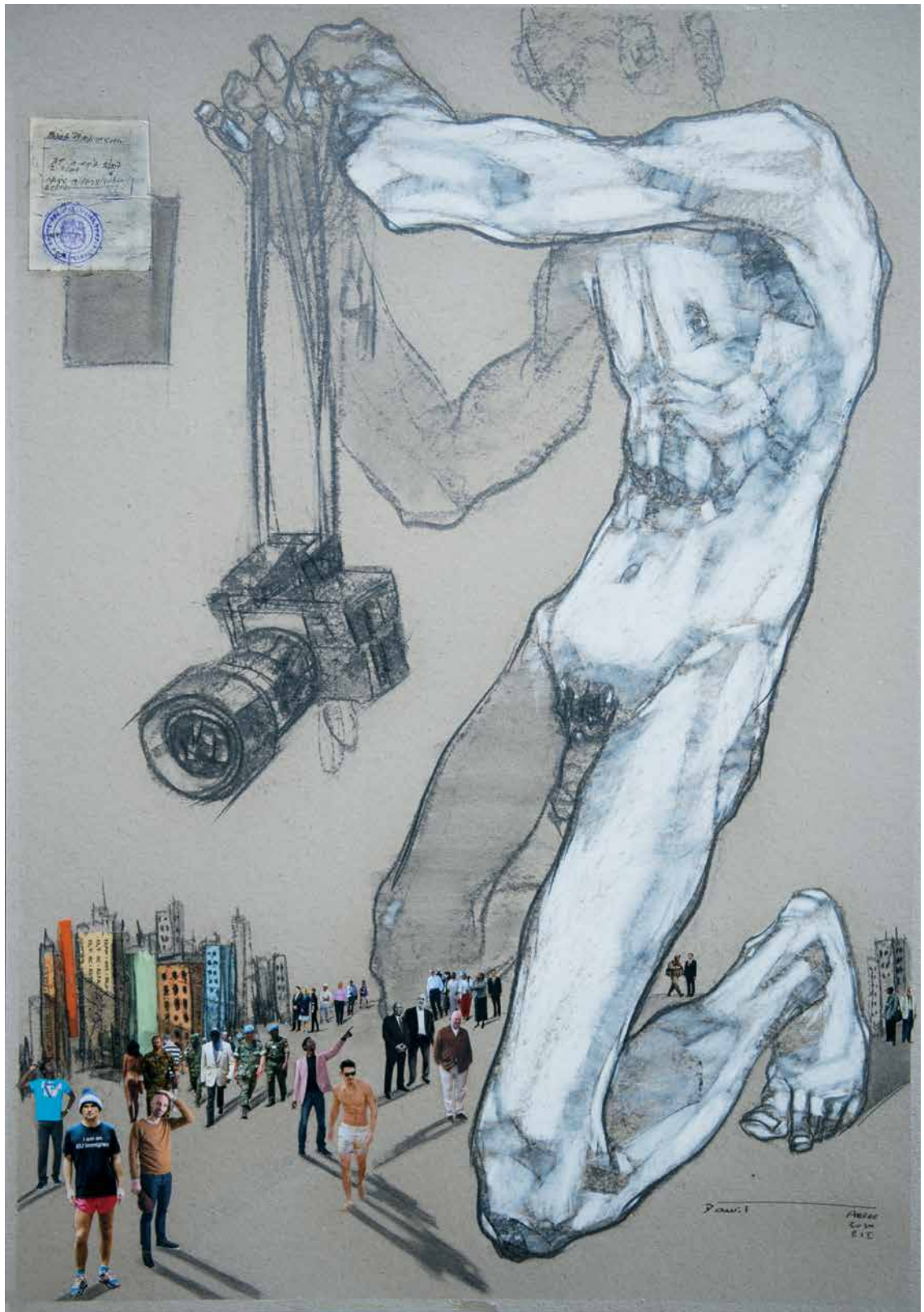


No. 2 Background 35, 2016. Acrylic and collage on canvas, 200 x 140 cm. © the artist



*Long Hands 21*, 2021. Acrylic and collage on canvas, 160 x 140 cm. © the artist





*Mutual Identity 11*, 2018. Collage and pastel on paper, 100 x 70 cm. © the artist