



Shirley Henderson



Cover: *Space Zone (State 4: Resolution)*, 1974-1993, oil on canvas, 96" x 72"

For me, when painting, what I take away is as important as what I add. However, it's what's left that matters. This remains true throughout all of my work....

Shirley Henderson



The Council, 1967, etching, 19" x 16"

Shirley Henderson

*Painter, Educator,
Courtroom Artist*

By Elisa Turner

Dynamic, impassioned motion suffused her DNA. It shaped her body whirling in space or capturing gestures on paper or brushing colors on canvas. It enriched Miami's past and present.

Since she was a girl, Shirley Henderson loved to dance, draw and paint. "She was a natural," remembers her older sister Sandra Henderson Frank. Around age eight, the future artist saw a cartoon in the local newspaper of a dachshund with the caption "Draw Me," so she did. "It was perfect," recalls Sandra.

At Kent State University, Henderson earned a BFA in 1965 and MA in 1966. She was a star, winning one of two scholarships available, recalls her former husband Robert Thiele, then her fellow art student. In 1966, with newly minted degrees, the two drove to Miami in a turquoise Pontiac Le Mans convertible.

That year, they both began teaching at Miami Dade College, where Henderson attracted attention for her novel approach. Robert recalls, "She was dynamic, really effective at getting students to respond," adding that she was "passionate, in their face, dancing and pirouetting, when she taught life drawing." He continues, "A class with Henderson was like a happening, because of the way she orchestrated the entire course. To this day, former students recall the positive influence Shirley's passionate teaching had on their own careers."



Transition & Repetition, 1968, oil on canvas, 54" x 60"

Robert remembers at that time Miami had a tiny community of artists. Sparkling with spirit and panache, Henderson immediately stood out for her talent as an artist and teacher, he says, summing up her effect with three words: "She created energy."

In 1973, Henderson left Miami Dade College to teach at University of Miami. Artist Louis Ulman recalls meeting her there around 1974. Later, they both taught at Miami International University of Art and Design. Ulman recounts her loving, accepting demeanor with students, continuing to focus on movement. "She was all about warming up before you even did gesture drawings of the model, getting them to dance and then into the space of drawing," he says.

In 1981, Henderson launched a bustling career as a courtroom artist. Her passion for figurative drawing was an excellent foundation for this new chapter, an intimate encounter with sunny Miami's dark and seamy side, where federal trials shocked the nation with their brazen corruption and evil. The Miami Herald



Birds and Beasts, 1968-1972, oil on canvas, 40" x 36"

described her as “Miami’s primary courtroom sketch artist.” Her courtroom illustration—featured in local, national, and international television news in both print and online media—have invited comparison with lithographs, published in Parisian newspapers, by 19th Century French artist Honoré Daumier.

While Henderson was making a mark in Miami’s courtrooms, in the 1980s she also made a mark in the budding artists’ colony on Lincoln Road in Miami Beach. During its heyday, this pedestrian mall had drawn shoppers to luxury retailers like Bonwit Teller and Saks Fifth Avenue. But by the late 1950s, its fortunes were fading as suburbia beckoned. Two decades passed. Lincoln Road was plagued by empty storefront windows and broken fountains.



The Pope & The Monkey, 1969, oil on canvas, 84" x 60"



The Red Hats, 1968, oil on canvas, 36" x 60"

In 1984, Miami cultural pioneer Ellie Schneiderman founded South Florida Art Center, now known as Oolite Arts. Henderson was an early tenant. Both women were part of the cultural renaissance reshaping Lincoln Road.

Henderson relished performing and teaching by example, exuberantly painting in her studio with its storefront window on Michigan Avenue, near Lincoln Road. In those days, she was known to stroll down the mall, wearing a kimono in bright colors, hair piled high on her head, no doubt cutting an unforgettable figure. The kimono she wore may speak to her later series of paintings, *Kimonos* (2002-2010), in which the body is implied but mysteriously concealed by the boldly painted fabric in her interpretation of this classic Japanese garment, so steeped in ceremonial traditions.

Taking a broad look back at her career, we can see that her paintings, drawings, and sketches encapsulate recurring themes like good and evil, judgement and juries, and spiritual figures. She was fascinated with the elaborate, crowded spectacles and voluminous vestments favored for centuries by the Roman Catholic Church, as demonstrated in paintings she especially admired by El Greco, Diego Velázquez, and later Francis Bacon.



Dolls 1, 1970, oil on canvas, 48" x 54"



Untitled, ca. 1970, oil on canvas, 30" x 40"
 From the Permanent Art Collection of the
 Miami-Dade Public Library System

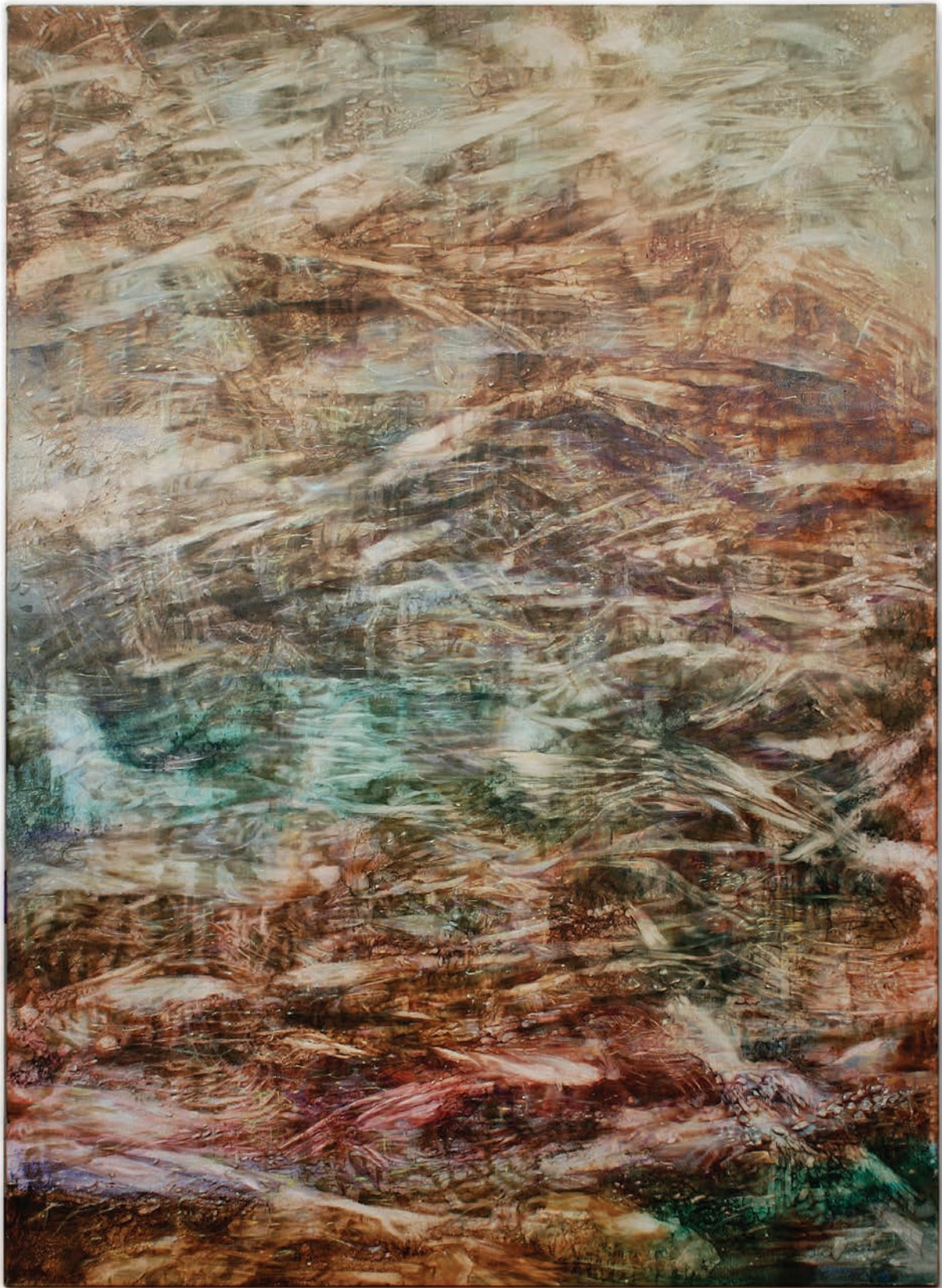
In her painting *The Pope & The Monkey* (1969), Henderson shows us a weak, flaccid-faced, blood-red gowned papal figure with paw-like hands looking away from the viewer. Posed next to him is a carefully rendered chimpanzee, staring vacantly in the viewer's direction, with hairy paws shaped like the pope's hands. Here, the ape evokes an early Christian symbol of the devil, pointing to hypocrisy and greed within powerful institutions like the Roman Catholic Church.

In June 2023, the *Miami Herald* detailed Miami's iconic federal trials. All but one Henderson had sketched: 1992 conviction of Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega for drug smuggling and racketeering; 1992 conviction of Liberty City cult leader and suspect in 20 homicides Yahweh Ben Yahweh for conspiracy to commit murder; 1996 and 2002 trials of "Cocaine Cowboys" Willy Falcon and Sal Magluta, first acquitted, but then retried and convicted for laundering drug profits and other charges after their 1996 bribery of jury members was discovered; and 2007 conviction of alleged al Qaida recruiter Jose Padilla for conspiracy to commit murder and funding terrorism.

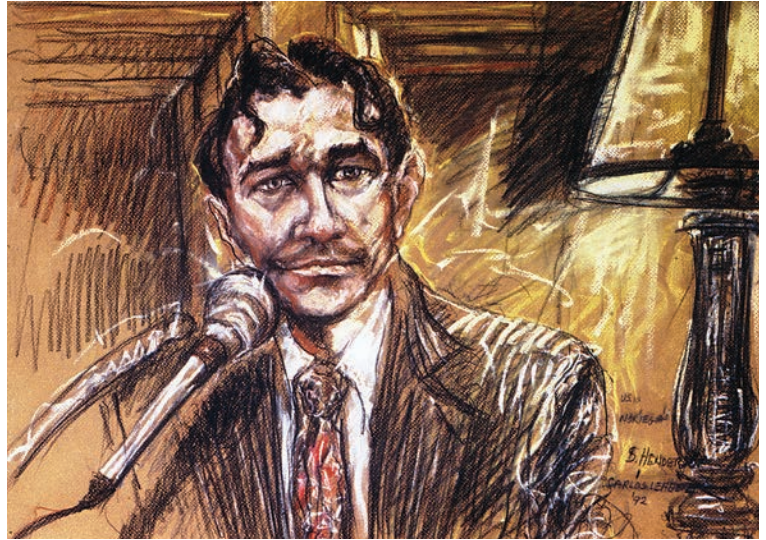


Samskrita, 1971, oil on canvas, 72" x 96" (diptych)





Above Below Through and Beyond, 1979, oil on canvas, 47" x 65"



Carlos Lehder, 1991, pastel on paper, 19" x 26"

Henderson's innovation to the genre of courtroom sketches was to produce hers on a warm-toned surface instead of white paper. The middle value of brown paper displayed greater contrasts in light and dark shades, adding to their dramatic immediacy and suited to representing the many skin tones in a diverse Miami jury.

Her 1992 portrait of Colombian drug lord Carlos Lehder reveals his gaunt visage leaning slightly toward a microphone, thrust like a weapon close to his jaw. A rapidly sketched background of thick brown pastel strokes emphasizes the white glare of artificial light exposing Lehder's tense facial expression, as well as jagged strokes of white erupting near his head and shoulder. They accelerate the tense mood, trapping him in a confined space.

Not only did Henderson excel at quickly capturing players in complex courtroom tableaux, she was a prolific, award-winning South Florida artist. Henderson's resume lists 18 solo exhibitions from 1970 to 2010 in South Florida; Toronto, Canada; and Saratoga Springs, NY, where she was an artist in residence at Skidmore College in 1979. It lists 28 group exhibitions from 1964 to 2007 including those at Cleveland Museum of Art; various South Florida venues; Jacksonville Art Museum; Detroit Institute of Arts; Berlin Museum; and Luxembourg Museum.



Eastern Exposure 1, 1979, oil on canvas, 47" x 65"

Threaded often throughout her abstract work are glimpses of landscape and figures. The chiefly abstract *Window Paintings* series of 1993-2014 sometimes render narrow streams of subdued, mostly monochromatic color, flowing both vertically and horizontally. They evoke the distorted perceptions of landscape as if seen through, and reflected by, a pane of glass in a window. As a result, shape-shifting glimmers of light shroud a world we can barely recognize. *Above Below Through and Beyond* (1979) is from her *Water Paintings* series of the same year. It's a wavering mass of thin scrims of color, delivering the sensation of being immersed in turbulent water with only the briefest sight of sunshine coasting on the water's surface. In *Energy Field* (1974) from her *Curtains and Veils* series, brilliant red and blue shards of color, recalling folded and ripped fabric that could be remnants from luxurious robes, hover on diagonal planes amid receding white splashes. It's a multidimensional field rippling with explosive energy.

A minimalist reduction of form, color and composition characterizes later work, such as the 2015 *Limited Palette Landscape* series. These monochromatic works, in shades of gold, brown, and gray, describe the distant outlines of places that could be either urban or rural, bereft of clear boundaries and volume.

Throughout her career, as an artist, educator, and courtroom illustrator informed by years of sketching trials unraveling the truth, Henderson pulls back metaphorical curtains to reveal the generous truth of her own experience.

Elisa Turner is an award-winning art critic based in Miami.

Over 35 years, I was hired to cover nearly every major Federal trial in the South Florida District as the courtroom artist for local, national, and international television news and print and online media. This allowed me to record, in rich pastels, the legal panorama that constitutes the dark side of an otherwise vibrant, cosmopolitan area in transition.

Shirley Henderson



American Civil Liberties Union of Florida v. the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service,
Haitian immigration class action suit featuring Ira Kurzban (top left) and Father Gereard Jean-Juste (top right),
1982, pastel on paper, approx. 19" x 26"



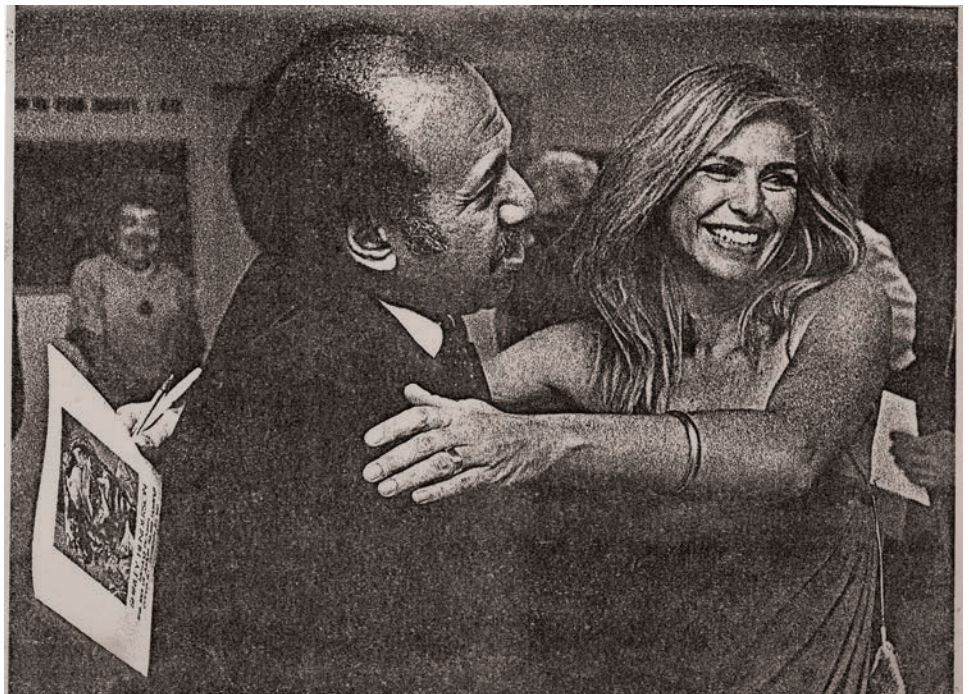
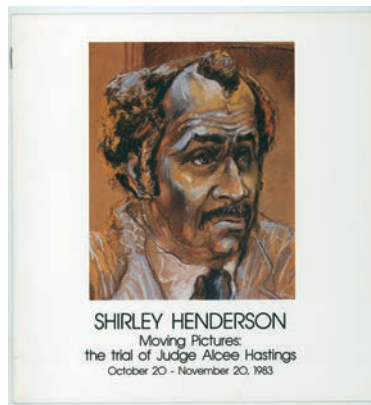
National Wildlife Rescue Team/Jack Kassewitz Jr. v. the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, Everlades deer kill hearing featuring Marjory Stoneman Douglas, NRA representatives, and park rangers before Judge Eugene Spellman, 1982, pastel on paper, 19" x 26"



Jack Kassewitz, Jr. v. the United States Army Corps of Engineers,
Featuring *Surrounded Islands* artist Christo, 1982, pastel on paper, 19" x 26"



The trial of Judge Alcee Hastings, 1983, pastel on paper, 19" x 26"



Moving Pictures, courtroom illustration exhibition, Hollywood Art and Culture Center, 1983



Richard's Fantasy, 1985, mixed media on paper, 50" x 38"



Oswaldo Coello, Miami River Cops defendant, 1985, pastel on paper, 19" x 26"



Ted Bundy, serial killer, 1989, pastel on paper, 19" x 26"



Figure #7, Dimensional Man Series, 1986, oil on canvas, 48" x 60"



Dimensional Man Series, 1984-1989, oil on canvas, each 48" x 60"



The Dinner Party, 1990, oil on canvas, 54" x 60"
1993 Florida Biennial, Purchase Award,
Polk Museum, Lakeland, FL



United States v. Manuel Noriega with US Marshal Michael Rand, 1991, pastel on paper, 19" x 26"



United States v. Manuel Noriega jury, 1991, pastel on paper, 19" x 26"



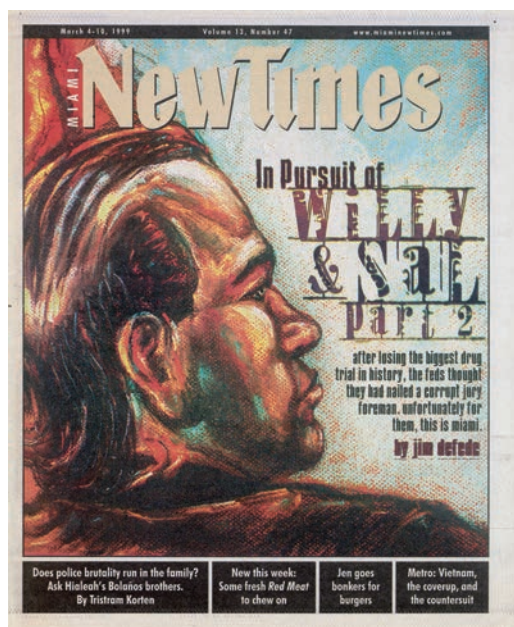
Yaweh Ben Yaweh, cult leader, 1991, pastel on paper, 19" x 26"



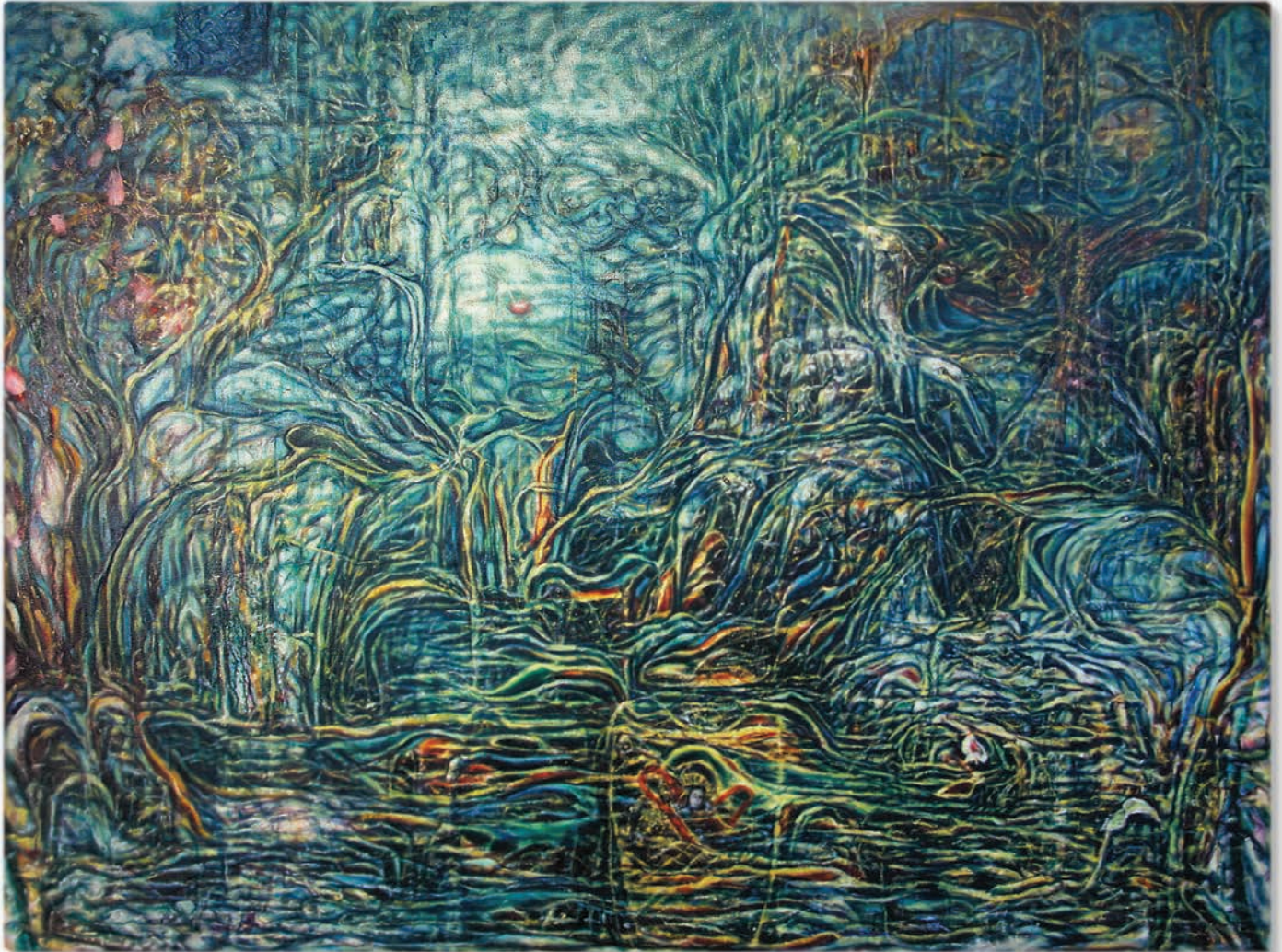
Willy & Sal et. al., 1995, pastel on paper, 19" x 26"



The original Falcón and Magluta Jury, 1995, pastel on paper, 19" x 26"



*In Pursuit of Willy & Sal, Part 2,
Miami New Times, Volume 13, No.47, 1999*



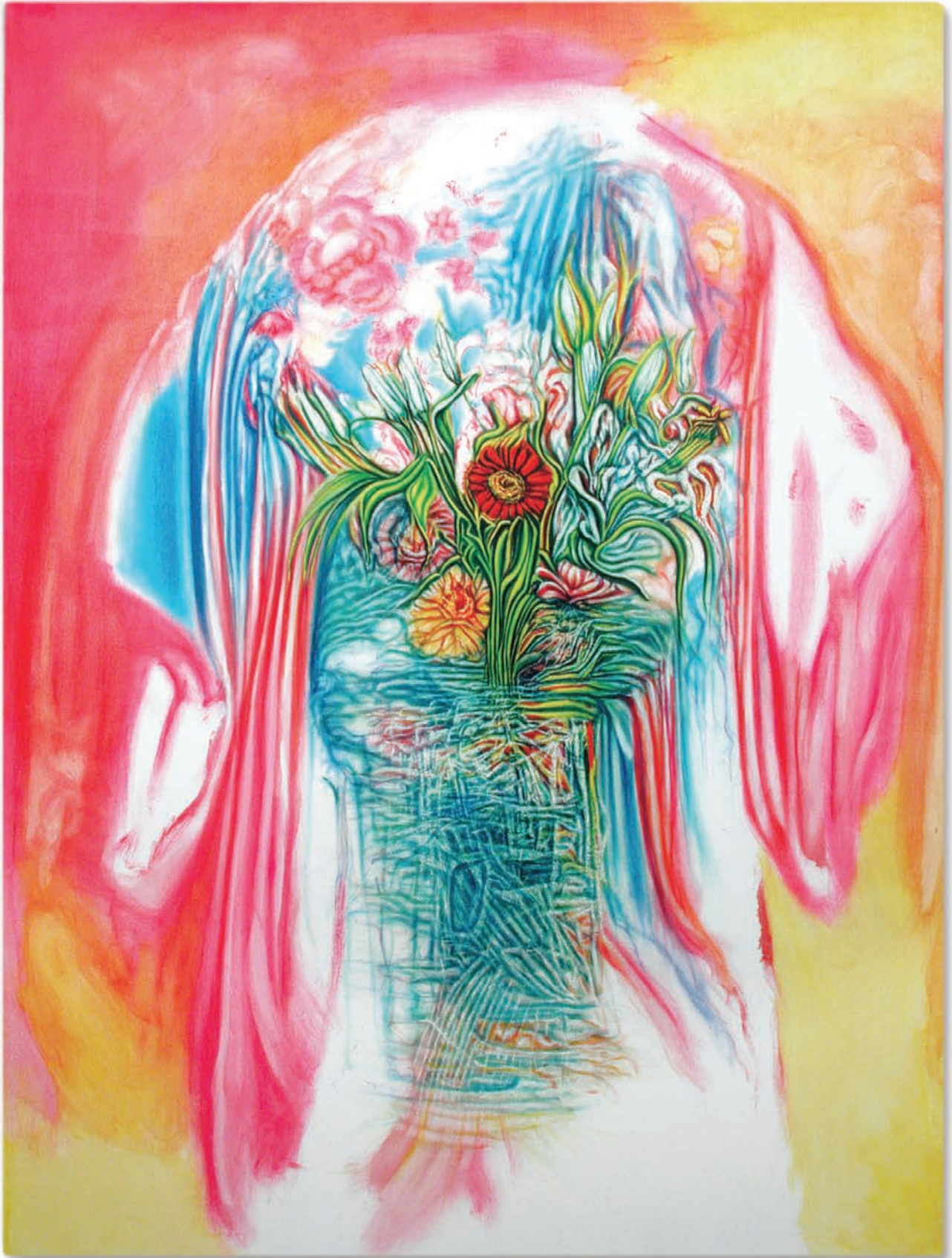
Glades Window, 1999, oil on canvas, 54" x 72"



George W. Bush & Richard Bruce Cheney vs. Florida Canvassing Boards,
w/ Judge Donald Middlebrooks, Solicitor General of the U.S. Theodore Olsen,
Bruce Rogow, Alan Dershowitz, et. al., November 13, 2000, pastel on paper, 19" x 26"



PODER Magazine, April 2002

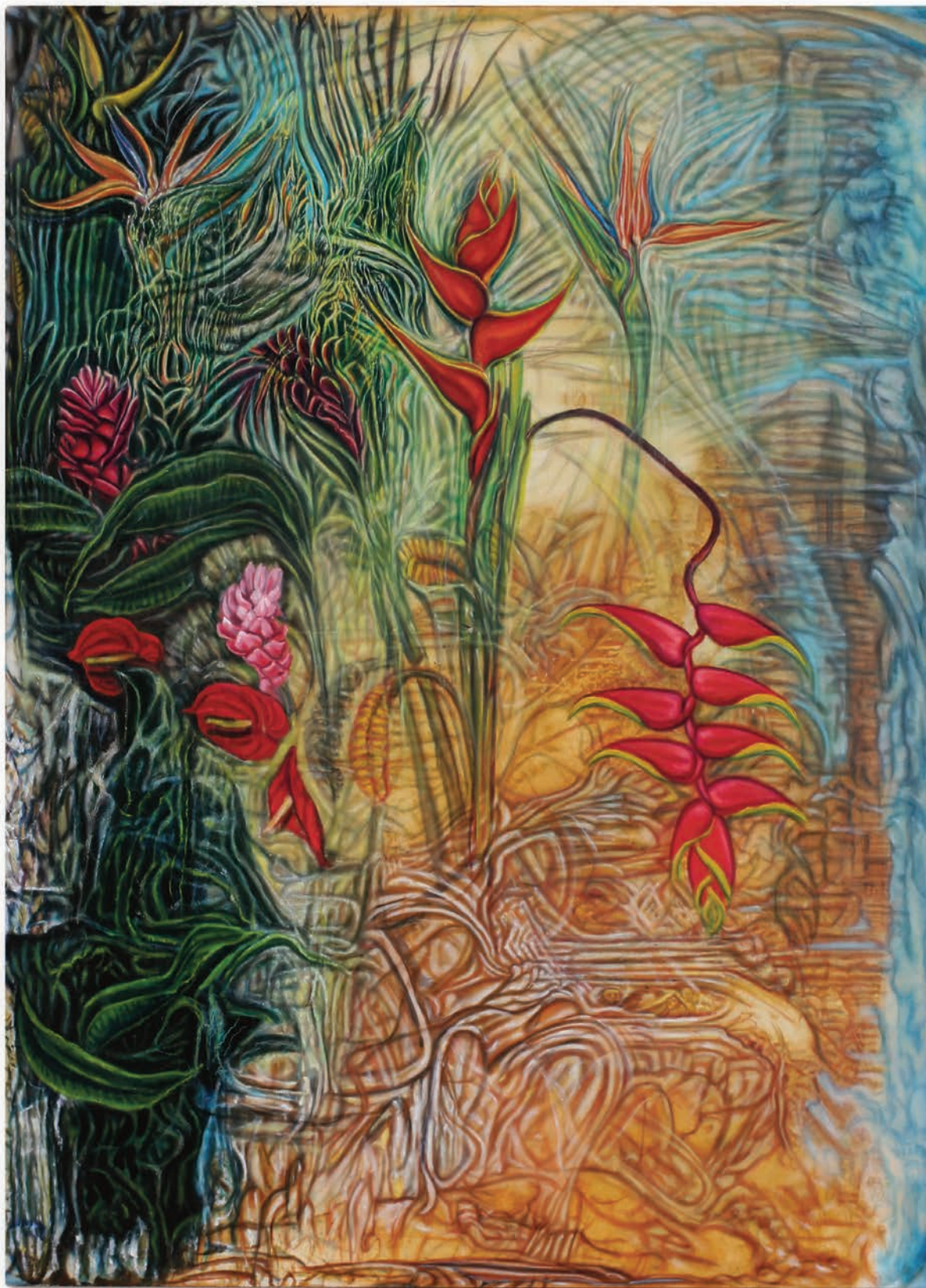


Red Daisy Kimono, 2003, oil on canvas, 66" x 48"



*Japanese Kimonos worn as spiritual garments by
implied travelers is the subject of this body of work.*

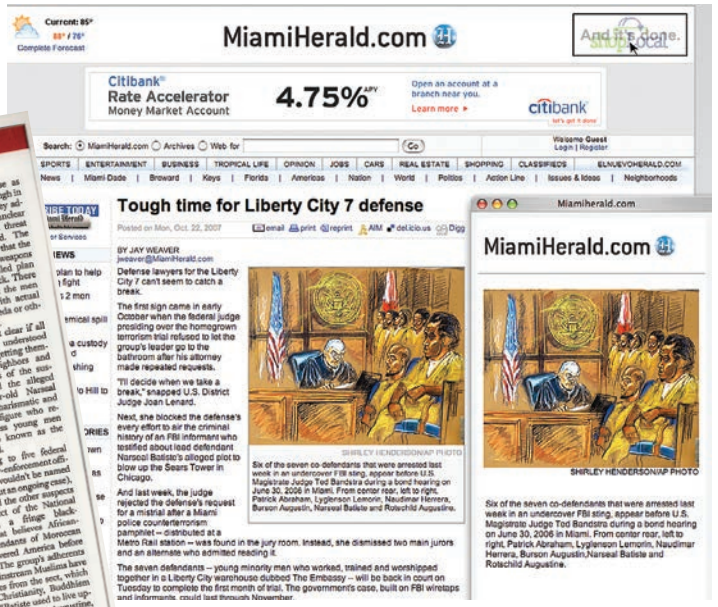
— Shirley Henderson



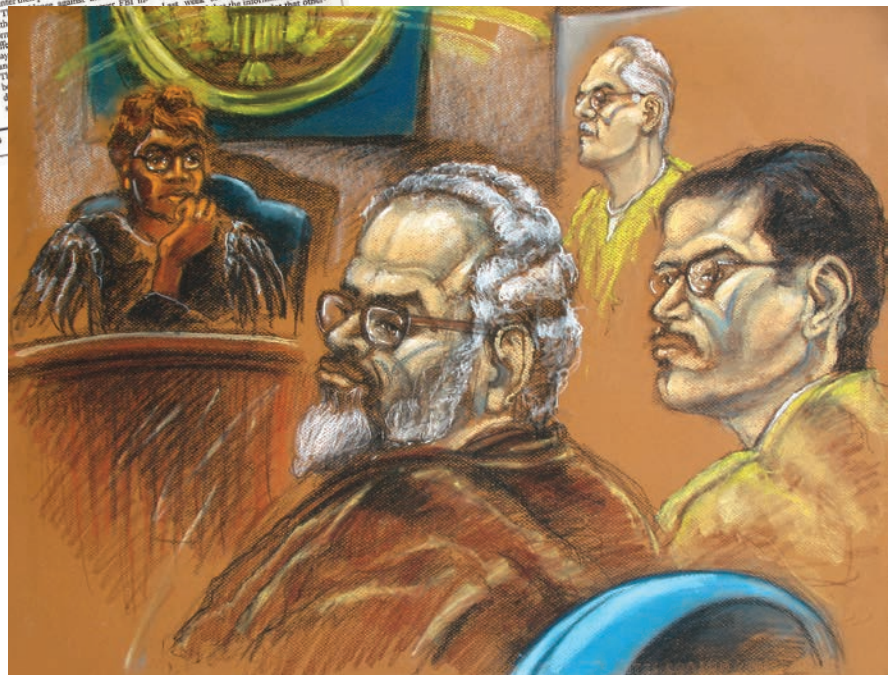
Exotic Floral Study, 2005, oil on canvas, 65" x 48"



Newsweek Magazine,
July 10, 2006



Liberty City 7 trial,
miamiherald.com,
October 22, 2007



Judge Marcia Cooke, defendants Adham Amin Hassoun, Kifah Wael Jayyousi, and
José Padilla AKA the dirty bomber, 2007, pastel on paper, 19" x 26"





Untitled (Savannah 1),
2015, oil on canvas, 30" x 40"



Select teaching tools, graphite, color pencil, and charcoal on paper, dimensions variable

She was dynamic—really effective at getting students to respond. Shirley was passionate, in their face, dancing and pirouetting when she taught life drawing. A class with Henderson was like a happening, because of the way she orchestrated the entire course.

Robert Thiele



Photo by Ignacio Medrano-Carbo, 1979

