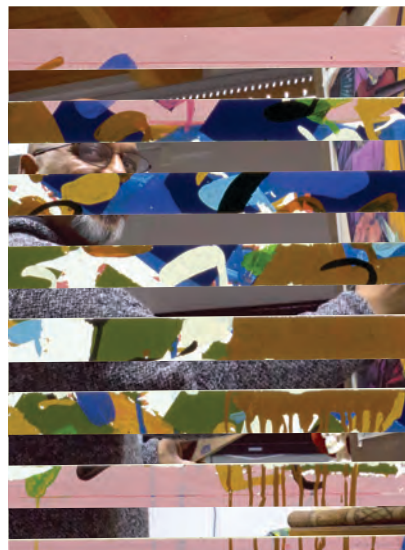


Reception: Thursday September 23, 6:00 - 8:00 pm

Exhibition dates: September 23 – October 23, 2021

Curated by Soni Martin, Professor of Art



Works by Artists Tourbe Ways of Knowing



Venue: Rosenthal Gallery, Fayetteville State University, Fayetteville, North Carolina



Ways of Knowing

Works by Vilas Tonape

Vilas Tonape is an internationally recognized artist and a professor of art at Methodist University in Fayetteville, North Carolina. A native of India, Tonape has been creating art for over 30 years. He received his BFA in Drawing and Painting with distinction from Sir J.J. School of Art, University of Bombay, India, and earned an MFA in Painting from Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, Texas. Tonape has participated in over 40 curated solo and group exhibitions, and his work has been exhibited internationally, including in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Ontario, and Mumbai. His work has won numerous awards both at home and abroad. In 2018, Tonape was honored with the Lifetime Achievement Award by the First Friday Forum of the Government Museum in Chandigarh, India. Tonape's art has been reviewed nationally and internationally; the Palm Beach Post described his painting as “classically inspired, contemporary-realism—interpretive images that enchant the eye.”

Acknowledgment:

The Department of Performing and Fine Arts is pleased to be able to present *Ways of Knowing: Works by Vilas Tonape* in Rosenthal Gallery on the campus of Fayetteville State University in Fayetteville, North Carolina.

The academic community and visitors from our locale and the region have an opportunity to observe an esteemed artist who brings a remarkable level of expertise and verisimilitude in his approach to contemporary realism. Exhibiting Tonape's figurative and abstract works challenges the misperception that an artist works either in the abstract or in the figurative—Tonape moves gracefully between the two styles.

Tonape's innumerable national and international exhibitions, the never-ending demand for his workshops, and the number and quality of his awards and honors are all evidence of the excellence of his achievements as an artist. We are privileged to be able to share a body of work by this highly respected and honored artist and educator.

On a personal note, we also would like to acknowledge how much the academic and artistic community appreciates not only his level of expertise but also his vital role as an art advocate in our community.

Jonathan Chestnut, Chair
Department of Performing and Fine Arts
Fayetteville State University



Curator's Statement:

Vilas Tonape is an artist known nationally and internationally for his masterful portraiture, still lifes, and non-representational paintings. Celebrated as a distinguished artist in his mother country, Tonape travels back to India each summer to give workshops for students of art. A huge number of students attend his workshops, and some have even traveled across the country to attend. It is with gratitude that Rosenthal Gallery presents a large body of the artist's work in *Ways of Knowing: Works by Vilas Tonape*. We are pleased that visitors will have the opportunity to observe his skill and command of mediums and to acknowledge personal meaning in his style.

The accompanying catalog encourages the viewer to reflect on Tonape's decisive composition, types of mark making, and particular choices of subjects. It also facilitates an awareness of his subtle and underlying structures to help visitors understand the direction of his work. Breaking with tradition, the exhibition places figurative and nonobjective works next to each other to reveal fundamental sources and influences—a stark reminder of the artist's diversified base of knowledge. Tonape is a master in the truest sense of the word.

One of Tonape's earliest works presented in the exhibition is *Moments of Gloria*, 2002. The 23.5" x 17.5" gouache on paper was created after Tonape graduated with an MFA in 1996 and the year before he was employed as a visiting artist at the Ringling College of Art and Design in Sarasota, Florida. In *Gloria*, he allows the sitter's essence to emerge from observation while mixing realism with abstraction. This painting, perhaps, is a pivotal moment in time and reveals Tonape's future journey of exploration and love for both the human form and nonobjective expression. Whether it is figurative or a nonobjective work of art, *Gloria* is an example of how Tonape creates the experience of time for the viewer. We are drawn in by the burst of shapes and brilliance of color, but we also find spaces of rest in the mimicry of push and pull, activity and calm in the pictorial space.

When comparing *Gloria* to *Life's Detritus*, an abstract work from 2016, similarities begin to emerge. Both works record the paint being released from the brush, as if Tonape is pushing himself to capture his vision before it fades. Although the forms in *Life's Detritus* are not volumetric, Tonape has again created a moment in time—the flurry of activity and struggle, shared with *Gloria*, are evident first, and then the dark vertical background becomes our place of rest as we begin again the cycle of looking. Both paintings exemplify ways in which Tonape's relationship with material and process creates meaning and connectivity.

While Tonape's creations may convey the feeling of effortless spontaneity, his process is never arbitrary. The spontaneity belongs to the viewer as they discover his masterful way of turning a piece of chalk or a dab of paint into an expressive image.

In *Robin*, an 18” x 24” pastel drawing from 2019, we readily notice the artist's control of material and keen observation in what he wants the woman's eyes to evoke. Tonape refers to the eyes of *Robin* as “independent from the tangible world.” Yet he leaves quantifiable mark making, directional arrows, and an orthographic projection of a rectangular form on the paper—all included when the drawing is framed. Tonape lent credence to the idea that material is integral to overall meaning when he stated: “Marks are evidence of the process.”

In the eyes of *Robin*, we glimpse another element that is essential to the artist: questions. Tonape's use of emotion, his placement of objects, symbols, and details, and his choice of models' gestures all prompt the viewer to ask questions about meaning in his works. Depending on the complexity of the work, the questions may multiply.

Tattoos, recently completed in 2021, is an example of the way Tonape has given the viewer prompts. The 24” x 18” pastel on paper is an exquisitely drawn female figure; the strap of her dark maroon chemise has casually slipped down her arm. Initially, we are mesmerized by Tonape's craftsmanship in drawing the figure and by the richness of the colors. Upon closer inspection, questions begin to form. Does she know the strap has fallen? Did she let it fall on purpose? Tonape has shared his ways of knowing with the viewer through discreet clues embedded in the portrait. The woman's face, at first glance, might seem stoic, giving little away. But her dangling earrings and tattoos suggest she does not shy away from being seen, nor is she apologetic to the viewer. Interestingly, one of Tonape's non-representational works, *Coexistence II*, 2018, lures the viewer into a similar reality. Its light, airy breathlessness is countered by the darker labyrinth set beneath the surface. A story exists in both the figurative and the nonobjective work.

Although *Vista*, an abstract acrylic on matboard painted in 2008, predates *Tattoos*, we see a similar maroon color at the top of the picture plane, openly competing for attention. In contrast to *Coexistence II* and *Tattoos*, which draw the viewer into a deeper, perhaps darker destination, *Vista* encourages us to seek the light behind it all; its pale, creamy yellow field appears just within reach. Within the layers, however, Tonape makes it clear that there are barriers and obstacles along the way.

Temptation, 2021, is Tonape's most recent figurative work. The 28” x 20” pastel drawing is an undraped female figure staged in one of the artist's complex still-life settings. The greater form of the central figure has been beautifully achieved, and we are attracted to the way color has been utilized to create volume within a busy pictorial space filled with symbolism. Applying what Tonape brings to the creative process—his way of knowing and the symbols used—heightens the intrigue of looking at *Temptation*. It is difficult to look away from the beauty of the subject and the symbolism in the drawing. Here the figure sits serene, oblivious to her audience. Objects in the composition are prompts for what the artist is trying to reveal to each viewer. We are left with questions about underlying meaning. As is the case with Tonape's creative process, nothing in the pictorial space is arbitrary; everything has been carefully selected with a purpose for the viewer to discover.

Witnessing, a 19" x 19" pastel work from 2017, is a complicated arrangement of three portraits in which the viewer is left to resolve the relationship. The luminous, warm skin of the seated live figure contrasts with her cool, semi-hooded stare—we sense her guarded gaze. A photograph of Frida Kahlo, the well-known artist and activist, is on her right. Tonape has painted himself into the background as an onlooker. After our senses acknowledge the skill of the artist, we begin to wonder about the relationship between the three portraits. Tension emerges in the work; Tonape's use of emotion, space, and iconic image leaves us with questions about the meaning of *Witnessing*.

As you leave *Ways of Knowing*, we hope the selected works, their arrangements, and the curator's statement have created an opportunity to see beyond Tonape's obvious talent as an artist. Enjoy his deft skill, but also compare his figurative and abstract works to understand and appreciate how he, as a storyteller, creates an experience for the viewer through the underpinning of his approach to materials and structure.

Ways of Knowing is an opportunity to see how Tonape masterfully convinces us that what we are seeing is how it looks—he reveals a type of reality. One of his greatest gifts is the ability to broaden our ways of knowing by helping us recognize the transcendent qualities of a still life, a portrait, or an abstract work of art.

Soni Martin, Professor of Art
Department of Performing and Fine Arts
Fayetteville State University



LIZ RAME
2011, watercolor on paper, 18" x 14"



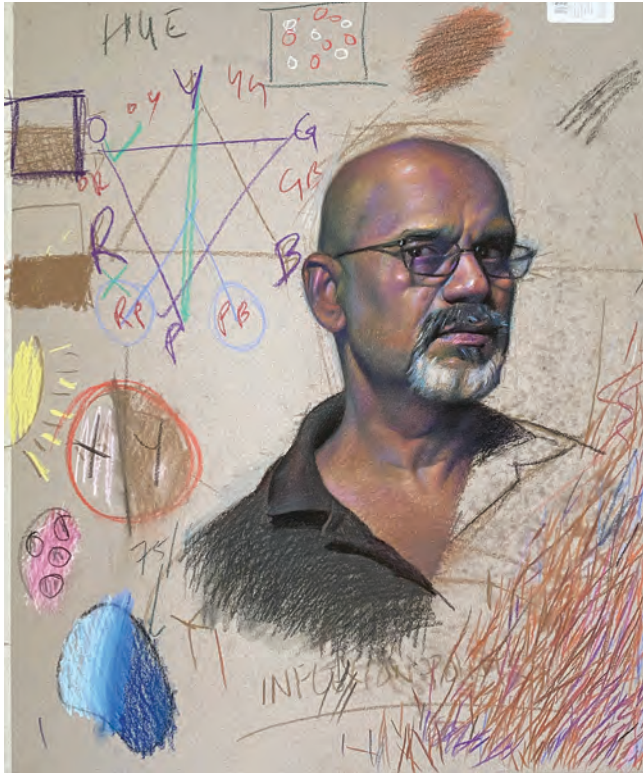
MOMENTS OF GLORIA
2002, gouache on paper, 23.5" x 17.5"



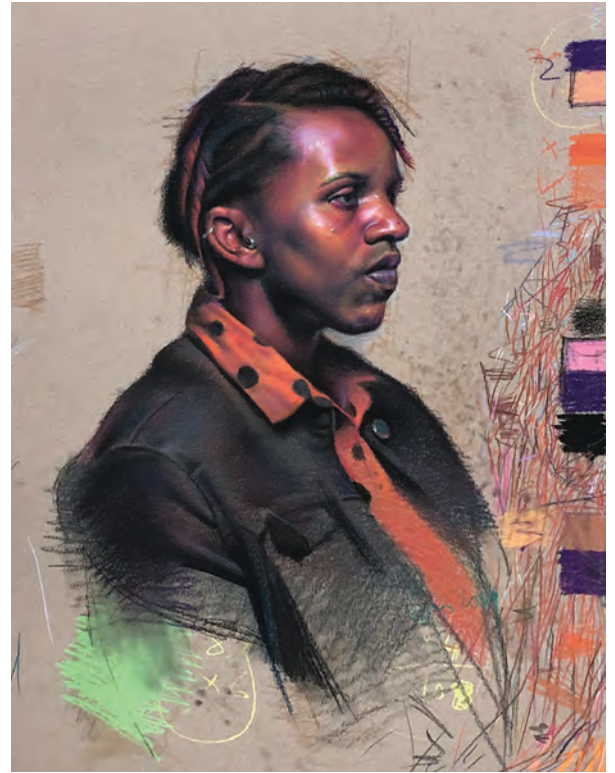
LIFE'S DETRITUS
2016, acrylic on matboard, 12" x 18"



CHELSEA
2011, watercolor on paper, 18" x 14"



PORTRAIT OF A TEACHER
 2020, pastel on paper, 24" x 18"



ISHIMWE
 2019, pastel on paper, 24" x 18"



ROBIN
2019, pastel on paper, 18" x 24"



IDEAL
2011, charcoal on paper, 24" x 18"



INTENTLY GAZING
2015, graphite and white charcoal, 24" x 18"



REDOLENCE II
2021, pastel on paper, 18" x 14"



TEMPTATION

2021, pastel on paper, 28" x 20"

collection of Erin Downey, Fayetteville, North Carolina



WITNESSING

2017, pastel on paper, 19" x 19"



TATTOOS

2021, pastel on paper, 24" x 18"

collection of Hina Bhatt Art Ventures, Pune, India



VISTA

2008, acrylic on matboard, 12" x 8"

collection of Soni Martin, Fayetteville, North Carolina



COEXISTENCE II
2018, acrylic on matboard, 18" x 18"



BANJO
2021, pastel on paper, 24" x 18"



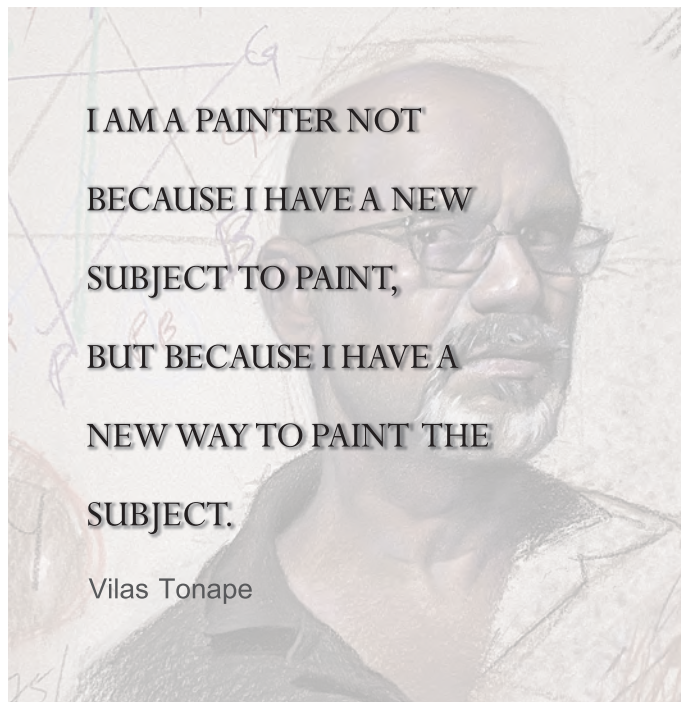
PASTORAL
2016, acrylic on matboard, 10" x 14"



MUSICOLOGY IV
2018, pastel on paper, 25.5" x 19.5"



LABYRINTH I
2016, acrylic on matboard, 12" x 8",



"BLINK I"
2003, acrylic on paper, 24" x 19"
(cover image)

SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

- Michelle Saunders, Outreach and Engagement Coordinator
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- Dwight Smith, Associate Professor of Art

www.VilasTonape.com



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