

DATEAGLE ART

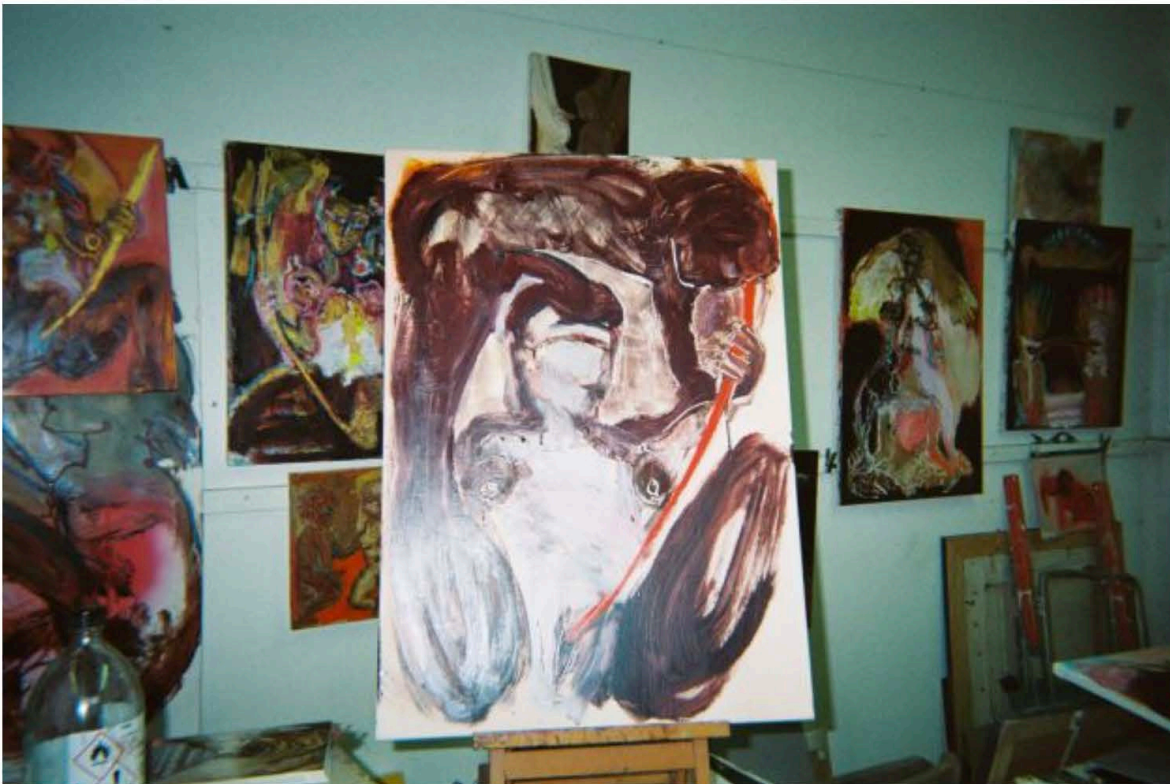
THIRD EYE STIRRINGS AND OPENINGS

The sowing of new seeds.

'In the dream I leave your house. You follow me, we talk, and laugh as we used to. You place your hands around the back of my head, your fingers massaging my well of dreams; my hair springs up between your fingers.'

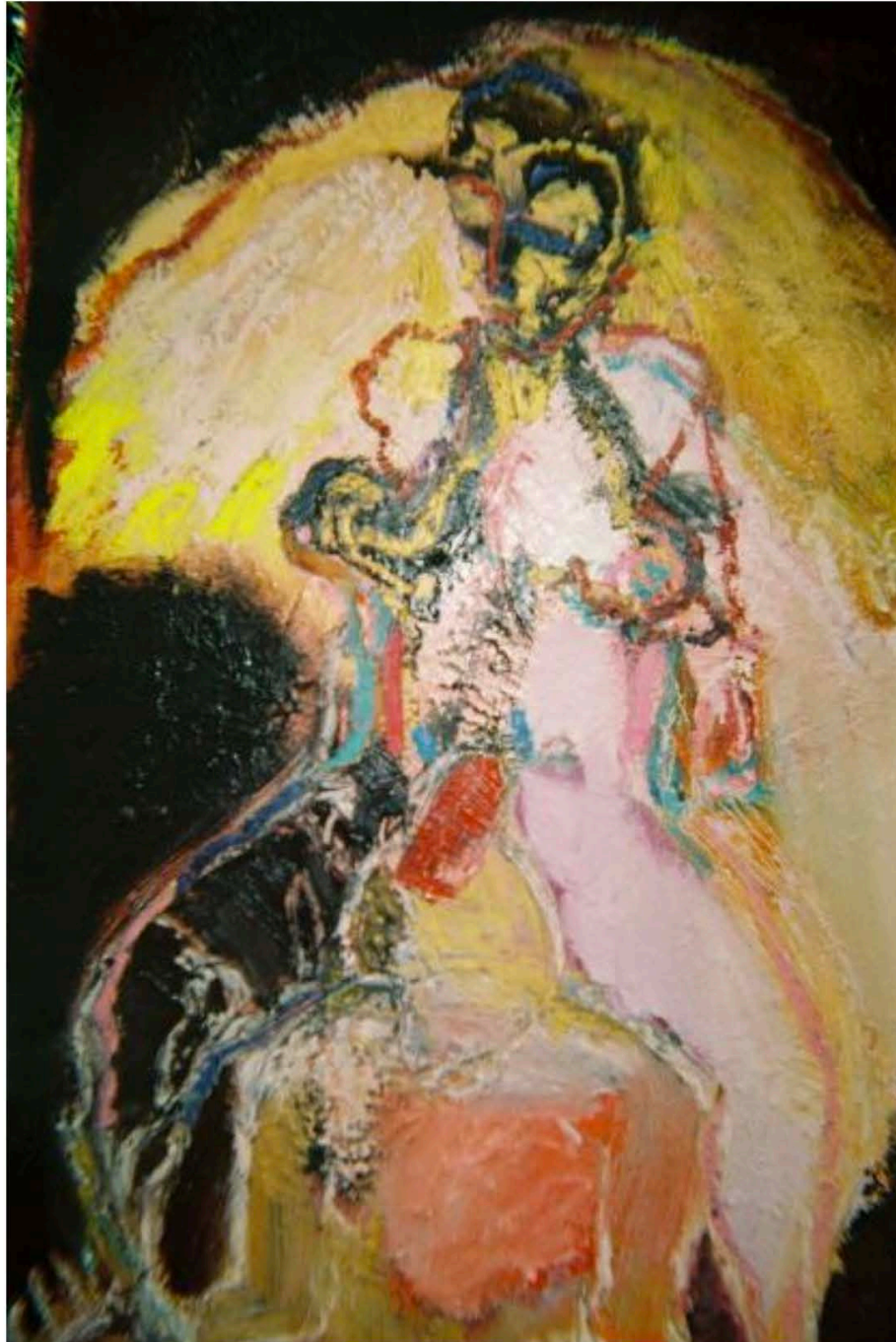
— Extract from *A Love Letter* (2021) by Kate Walters

For over three decades, writer and artist [Kate Walters](#) has been carving a creative practice that departs from – and incorporates – shamanistic beliefs.



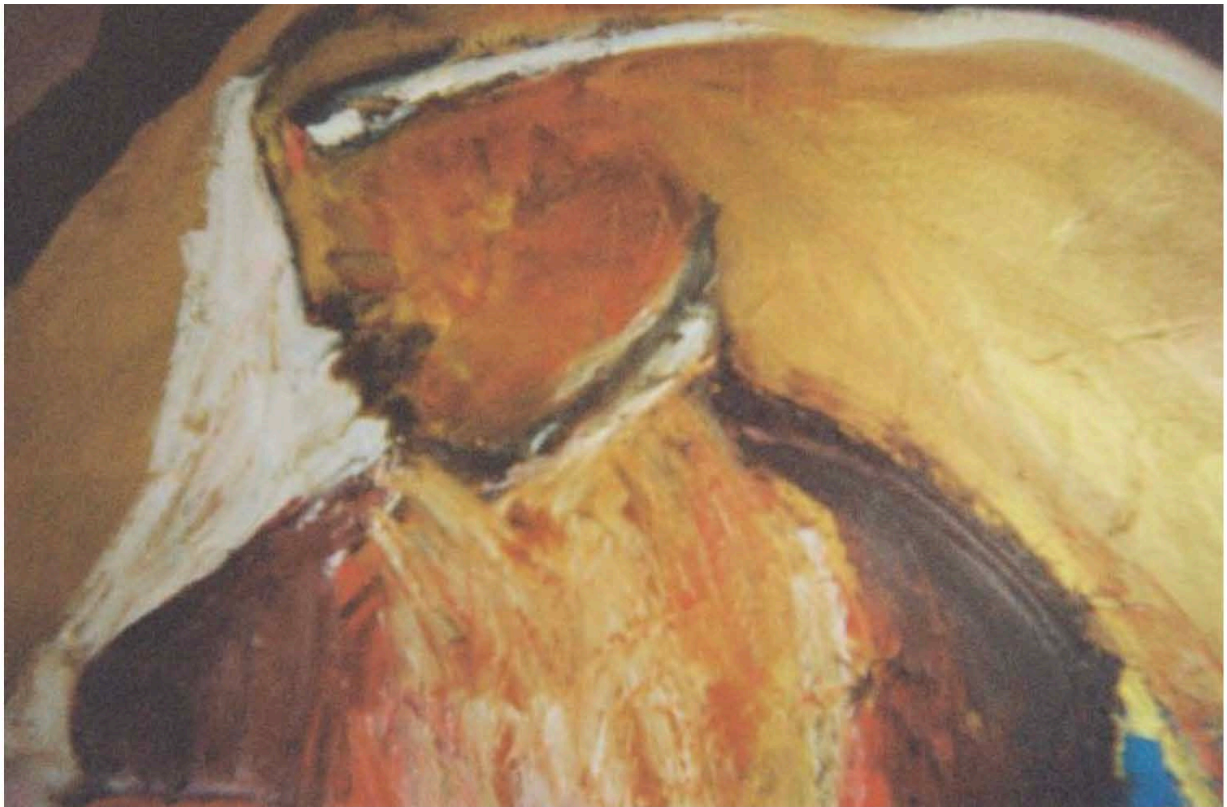
Her sensitive and expansive approach seeks to think through and uncover quotidian mysteries. Walters delves into the subconscious in order to better understand our human personhood and innate ambitions. In addition to embracing female sexuality as a form of power, her creative process seeks to give consciousness to *other* beings, such as animals and spirits.

While researching her regularly-posted works, which appear like a stream of raw consciousness on [her Instagram](#), a recent painting captured my attention. The portrait of [a female figure](#) outlined in richly-applied brown paint is rendered naked gazing directly at the viewer while expelling red fluid – blood, semen, milk or perhaps even rope? – out of her vagina.



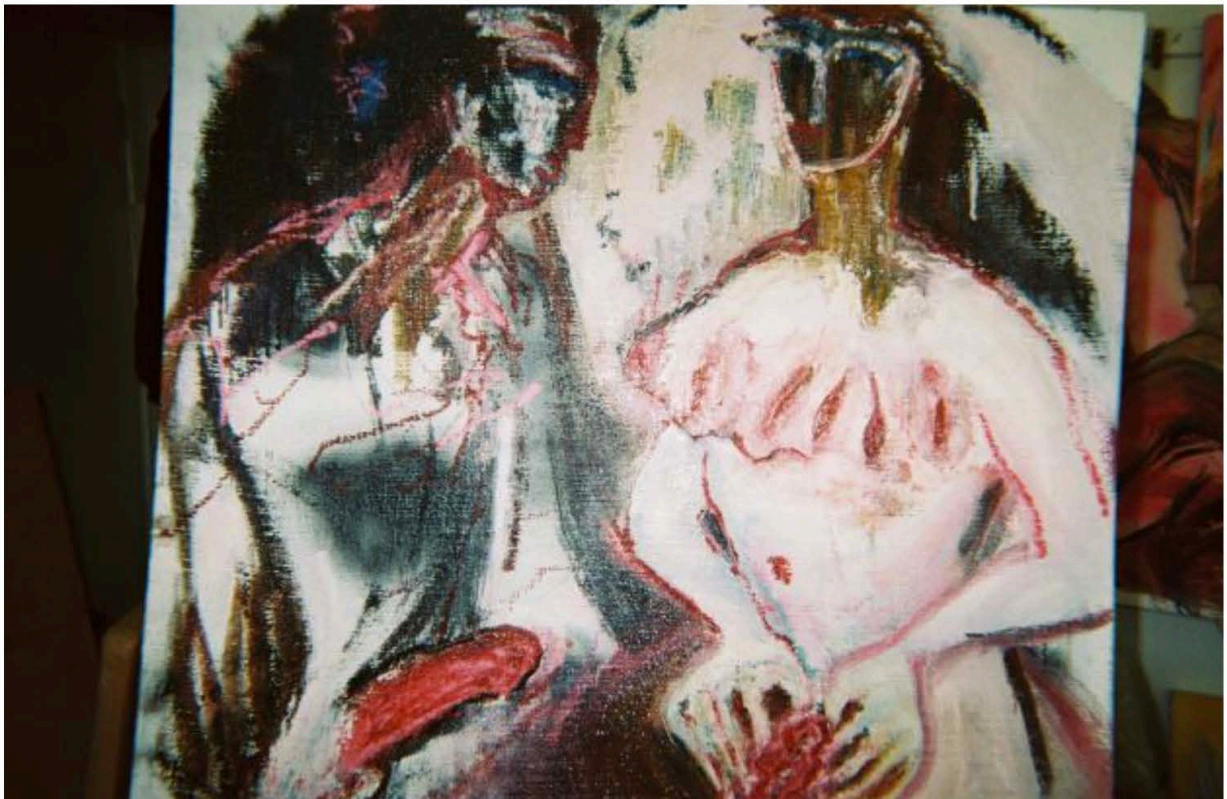
Simultaneously recognisable yet abstract, the work is raw and intense, unforgiving and elusive like artist Lee Lozano's animistic paintings of tools and faces from the 50s and 60s. Walters's desire for ambiguity is key to unlocking this piece. Looking to find 'The Man in The Woman' and 'The Woman in The Man,' she seeks to destabilise inequalities of power, gender, age and sexuality.

Her painting has since been named 'The Red Cord' and selected for the 2022 BEEP Painting Biennial in Swansea, Wales. Its [caption](#) reads, 'Detail of a new painting in progress. An initiation I think; piercings, penetrations and realising. Crown, third eye stirrings and openings, the sowing of new seeds.' Also named is her upcoming *LOVE Paintings* solo exhibition at [Arusha Gallery](#) in Edinburgh this coming summer. Walters has had a fruitful year, as new and unapologetic seeds are being sown.



In a time of social media-enforced censorship, and a broader culture where sexuality is a far-removed topic from education and everyday life, Walters is keen to bring thought surrounding this bodily topic – and the freedoms it can unlock – into the conversation of contemporary art.

I notice her account on Instagram has been shadow banned. This occurs when content moderators of an online platform purposefully make one's account difficult for others to find. Their strategy includes making one's username difficult to find and directing visitors away from one's social media pages unless they are actively seeking them out.



Frustratingly, this often impacts artists with radical work incorporating overt politics or references to sexuality. I found myself in this same problem working on an exhibition about queer nightlife at Ridley Road Project Space with photographer Roxy Lee earlier this year. Female sexuality is an algorithmically enforced taboo, it seems, which highlights the urgency of Walter's practice.

'I don't want to apologise for anything anymore,' she tells me on the phone. 'I don't want to waste any time.' Abandoning watercolours because they are 'too polite', Walters is now working at a larger scale than ever – in luscious, glistening mediums including oil and ink. Alongside this independent work, Walters also organises group communal activities such as healing workshops, wellbeing courses and outdoor retreats.



'The man who brings me salt in my waking dream: A painting or a series of drawings of a man bringing me salt to fill my holes, to keep my wounds open.'

— Extract from *Dartmoor: a few days' retreat in a cabin* (2020) by Kate Walters

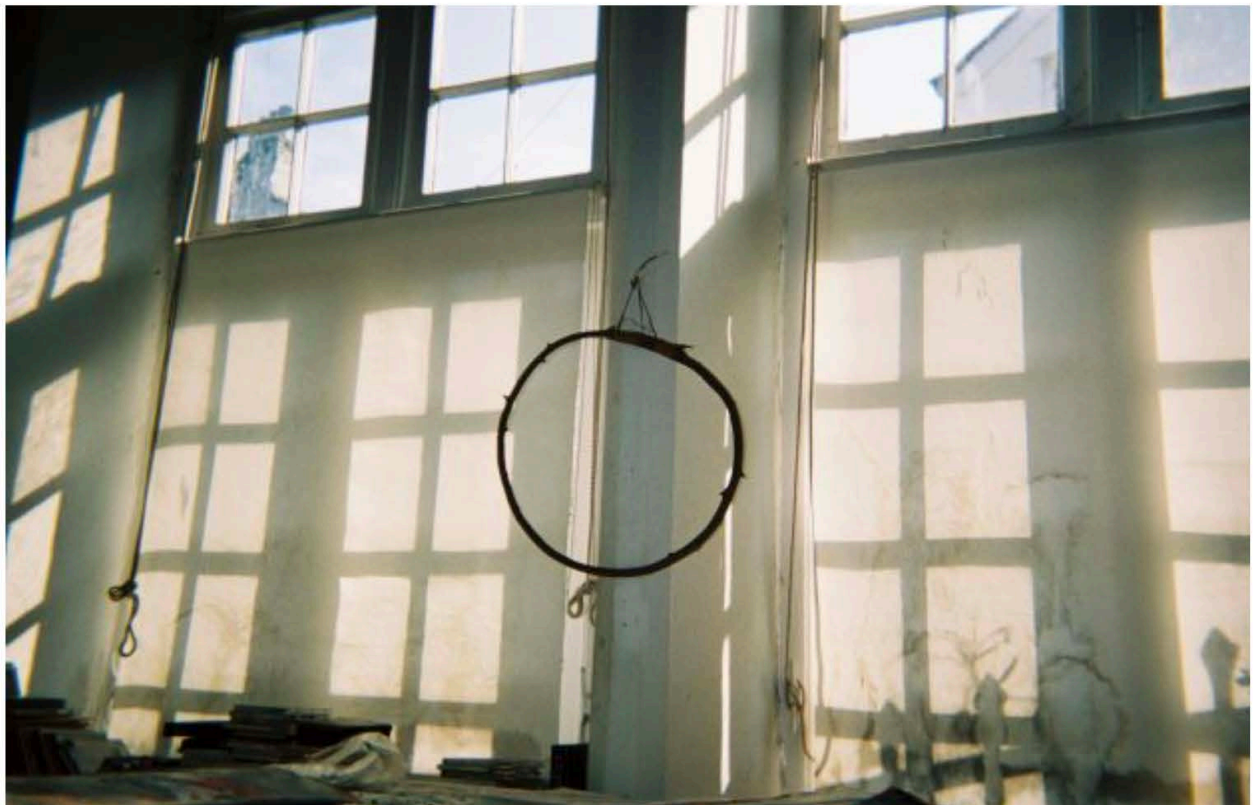
Piercing and penetration are key facets of her aesthetic language. Her portraits of human figures gape with multiple crevices which are dark and open. This style is both a reference to sexuality and our innate human ability to grow through pain – as our wounds heal and repair stronger. Describing one painting she notes 'she is less afraid than before' – fear lies in the unknown, but can be contained with repeating bouts of strength.

Walters' recent series has been named *Love Paintings*. Rituals and repetition reverberate throughout them, often depicting individual and collective sexual play and intimacy. In these, she seeks to replicate the innate sexual force present within humans, referred to as '*Mother Kundalini*' in Hindu culture.



'Mother Kundalini is what Tantra is about, really,' she elucidates. 'Kundalini is the coiled snake sleeping at the base of the spine in most people. When it awakens and sends a surge of electrical charge up from the base to various centres in the body, you get this incredible spiritual enlightenment.' Harnessing this power can be a healthy way to explore our own paths and desires that we don't often think or converse about, she suggests.

Walters brings together learnings from psychoanalysis and her experiential research into native American shamanistic thinking: often told through phenomena like power animals and spirit guides, for instance. Throughout these, narratives can be understood to activate the subconscious, and the dreaming mind.



Transforming these dreams into physical visions art is a process crucial in her journey of self-understanding. 'My paintings always teach me something,' she says. While curator and writer Richard Davey once described her practice in 2017 as 'a shamanic hollow bone, a conduit between physical and immaterial realms'. Walters records her night-time visions every day, rising at 4AM to record them – pointing out that this process often results in them becoming increasingly vivid over time, while also recalling them more accurately.

A recent series of paintings titled *Night Drawings* (2022) utilises cacao, watercolour sticks and plant ink on Japanese paper. Their rich and glistening mahogany colour parallels their intense subject matter of writhing and contorted bodies and spirits.



The use of cacao references the ritualistic 'cacao ceremonies,' still common in countries such as Mexico in South America, where chocolate in its purest form is consumed in unison by a community. The process – extending back to Aztec and Mayan civilizations – typically involves the complete opening up to strangers within a circle, creating a safe and balanced space where fears, hopes, dreams and suffering can be shared. 'Cacao opens and soothes the heart; tears are her medicine' Walters poetically points out their importance in processing negative energies and past traumas, and actively seeking healing.

Describing how shamanism is bonded with her paintings and physical reality, Walters noted how the 'central guiding principles of Shamanism is that everything (in the world) is alive and is connected.' She continues remarking that, 'the best teaching comes through dreaming because in that state there is no possibility of the ego distorting or interfering with the images and their meaning. It is the high-energy ones which I take care to remember and reflect upon; this requires a level of discernment and patience in order to understand and learn from them'.



Her emphasis on patience also links with her interest in dance. She tells me that part of her shamanic work involves 'Native American serpent dancing, a powerful, healing dance. It connects you with profound earth energies... I push myself hard and let go'.

Painting with both hands while listening to Sufi trance music, sometimes banging a traditional drum, Walters often moves in front of her easel, releasing an engulfing and immersive energy which ricochets across her canvas. With this in mind, her final paintings – provoking forms to emerge by inducing the subconscious – are better described as performative rather than pre-meditated.



One particular observation from our conversation stands out to me. Traditionally, the Shaman is known as the 'wounded healer' and 'the context of healing is always the self together with the broader community.' In ancient times, the 'healer' and the artist were always considered to be the same person.' In other words, the artist should always consider themselves a healer, not only for themselves, but for each other...

Walters's upcoming show, *LOVE Paintings*, will open at Arusha Gallery, Edinburgh, Scotland on 23 June 2022.

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WORDS BY LAURIE BARRON