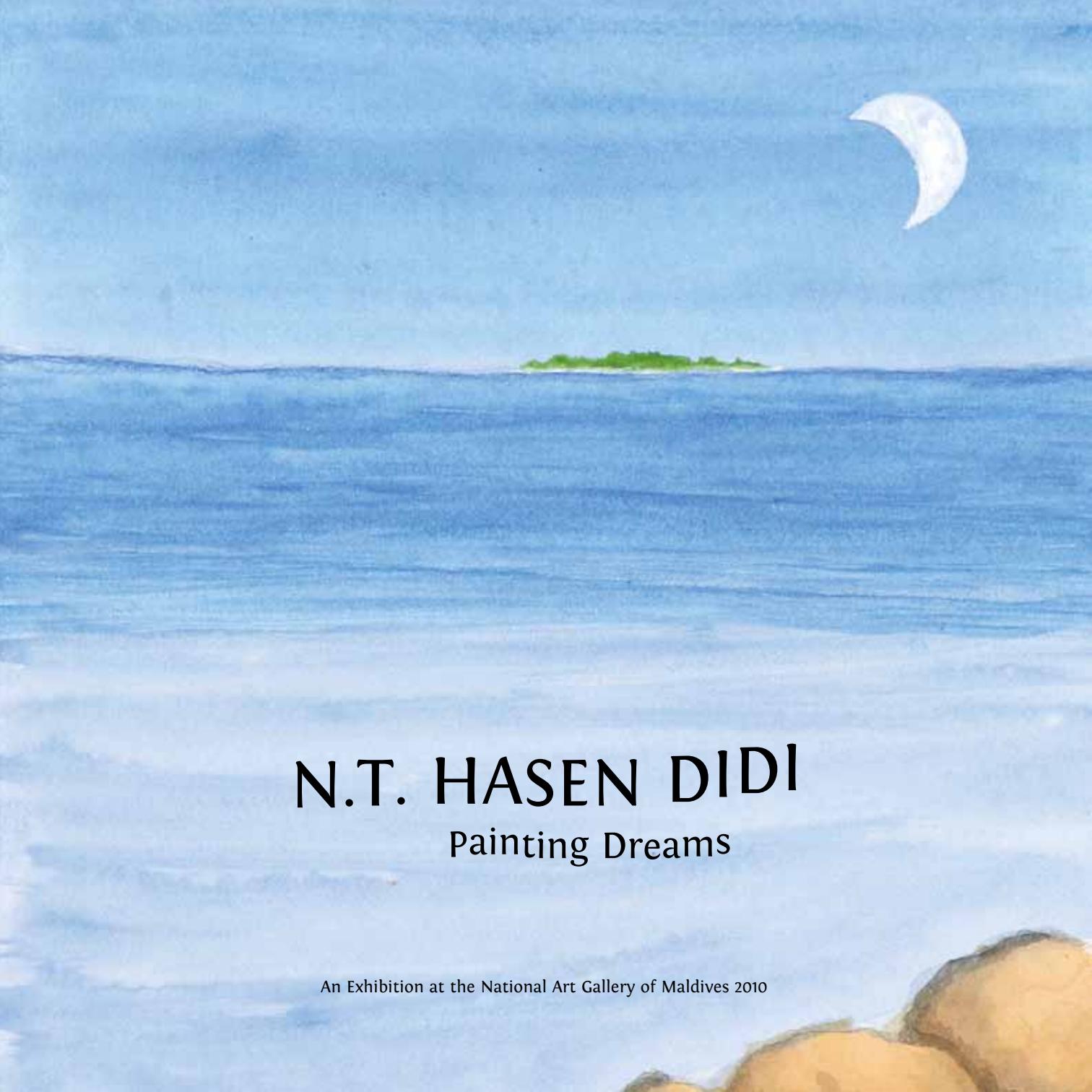


N.T. HASEN DIDI

Painting Dreams

2670 NT



**N.T. HASEN DIDI**  
Painting Dreams

An Exhibition at the National Art Gallery of Maldives 2010



It is with great excitement that the National Art Gallery (NAG) has curated this collection of works by N.T., who is counted among one of the most distinguished intellectuals of our time. It is rare in the contemporary history of the Maldives that we are able to experience such intimate insights into the workings of a mind that seems to be forever flowing through thoughts and feelings which weave in and out of dreams and realities.

Now in his '80s, N.T.'s paintings and photographs are just but a strand among many of what can be deemed as symbolic of what the 20th century meant to Maldivians. His paintings depict abstract and surrealistic imagery with titles that seem to be or sounds like a pun on the visual image depicted. Reminiscent of the Surrealist Master Rene Magritte's 'The Treachery of Images' (1928-29), N.T.'s works seem to comment on the improbable stemming from what is visible. Or, at times they seem to hint at the childlike and playful nature of imagination, making natural objects look unnatural and surreal.

While N.T.'s paintings on show seem to have been mined from his dreams or the interaction between his fertile imagination and seen and lived experiences, the photographic works on display tell the story of human beings through the depiction of their hands in various contexts. Initially exhibited in the '90s at the Esjehi Gallery with the title 'Eloquent Hands', the exhibition is an integral component of the present retrospective. While a body of work on its own, they compliment the paintings and enhance the overall scope and reach of the exhibition by letting us see very different dimensions of an acute and engaged mind.

The NAG is thankful for N.T. for loaning his works to this exhibition. The NAG is also indebted to N.T.'s sons Mohoj and Huchen for providing us with insights on N.T.'s life and works which are captured in the essay especially commissioned for the exhibition catalogue and researched and written by Ifham Niyaz. Special thanks also go to Ahmed Naeem and Fathmath Filza and all other staff at NAG who have worked under stressful conditions with minimum resources and staff.

Mamduh Waheed



SAME GENERATION  
photograph



FOOD PREPARATION  
photograph

N.T. once said that  
a practical, competent person's hands are  
not the same as an artist's with dreams.  
Hands, he says, can be a key to the personality of its owner.

Painting Dreams,  
the most recent collection of his paintings,  
give evidence to these words.

The paintings that have been produced by  
N.T.'s hands are each an ode to his dreams.

They are like verses from a song  
sung in selected phases and places of the artist's life.

The paintings are all nothing but his dreams, he says.

And like dreams,  
they are surreal yet sometimes very real.

They are mystical yet unpretentious.  
Unfathomable, yet honest.

EMPTY  
oil on canvas  
18.5" x 14.5"





ROAD  
water color on paper  
16" x 12"



Noomaraa Ganduvaru Thuththu Manippulhu's  
Hasen Didi (N.T. Hasen Didi)  
was born in 1924 in Malé, Maldives.

He was educated first in India and  
later in Majeediyya School, Malé.

He said he learned colour pencil  
drawing in school, at the age of twelve.

After school he joined the Home Ministry  
as a clerk and progressed from various jobs  
in various ministries, until he was fired  
from the job of Commissioner of the  
Anti-corruption Board.



Painting and gardening are N.T.'s hobbies.

He has travelled through the atolls of Maldives  
in various stages of his life.

He reads much and expresses a certain fascination  
for the writings of Omar Khayyam,  
as visible in some of his works of art in the eighties.

He writes much too.

Mostly writings related to his hobbies and island travels,  
including a detailed book about Huvadhu Atoll in Maldives  
with his own illustrations and a book about native flowers.

THE JUNGLE  
oil on canvas  
22.75" x 16.6"

30.8.02.



PALETTE  
oil on board  
17" x 13"

N.T. 2011.05.  
ED FITR

N.T. has been painting for a long time.

Among his paintings are minimal yet illuminating black and white illustrations, spontaneous expressions of patterns and landscapes in water colour, and depictive and abstract forms in oil, some expressed in brush strokes of bold emotions and others grandly visualising verses written by the artist's favourite poets.

N.T.'s paintings tell a collage of tales and narratives.

It is as if all the elements and cycles of N.T.'s life are expressed in his collection of works produced over many years.

The mood of his artwork varies with varying concepts and differing phases.

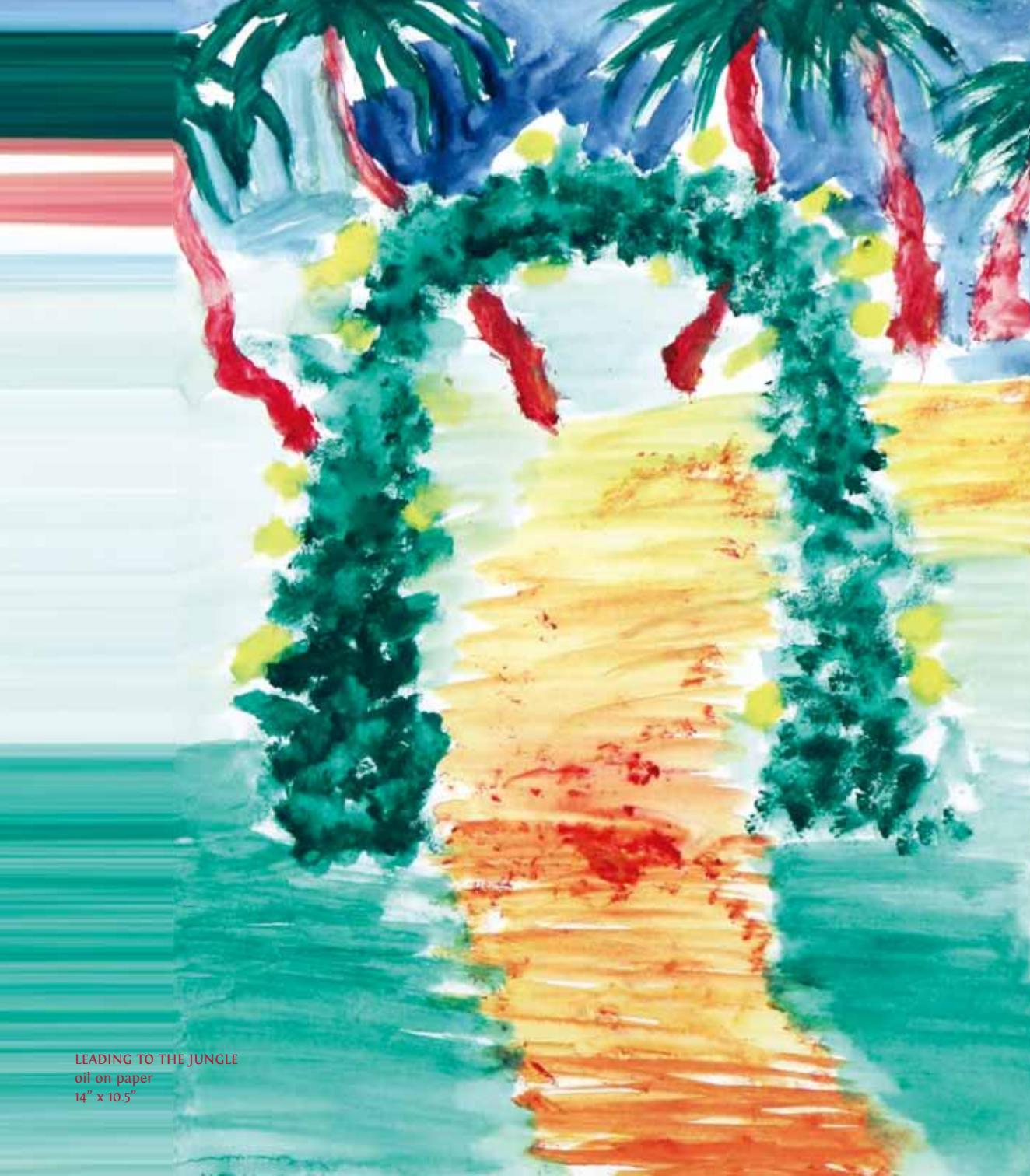
It is as if several different artists have produced these works, each artist expressing their individual circumstances, feelings, and inspirations in different styles and differing brush strokes.

N.T.'s artwork seem out of place if compared to the time of its conceptualisation.

As if this is an artist who is ahead of his time, considering the progression of Maldivian art in the last eighty five years and considering the status of Maldivian art up until today.

NO SLEEP  
oil on canvas  
18.75" x 15.5"





LEADING TO THE JUNGLE  
oil on paper  
14" x 10.5"

Most of N.T.'s paintings produce an element of mystery.

There is always an untold story that links each of his works to the next, making the viewer wonder about the strings and patches that weave these paintings together.

So much so that there is a continuous temptation to go back to a painting viewed before, just to see how a certain recurring element in it has turned its colour or mood altogether to reveal a totally different thought provoking story.

N.T. uses various prominent symbols in every series of related paintings.

There is the recurring crescent moon that is prevalent among most of his works.

There is the repeated use of a similar island setting, mostly under the dark night sky, in a deep bluish black sea.

There is a certain distinction of altering moods that are vividly created with the expression of dark black seas, calm blue seas, and rough, foaming seas, all painted with the similar static island in the horizon as a background.

And there are other bold variations to this backdrop as in the painting titled 'Splash', where blotches of red, green, and black agitate the otherwise serene yet dark setting.

But then, there is the same island setting titled 'Lonely Bird', where the light of the day and the sight of the solo bird in flight are used seemingly consciously to give a whole new meaning to the underlying story.

As do the alterations created by the use of driftwood, the paper boat, and the 'One Oar Too Many', floating in the same seas with the same island in the horizon.



LONELY BIRD  
water color on paper  
16.5" x 12"

All but few of N.T.'s recent paintings seem to be expressed along abstract themes associated with island life.

Even when a painting is seemingly realistic, there is usually always a conceptual element present, as in 'Loony' where the usual white coral lined walls, greenery and neatly swept sandy grounds are contradicted or maybe complemented by the presence of a white dangly figure.

If all these elements in N.T.'s paintings are dreams, and if dreams are a product of what we see and live with, then it is impossible not to think about all the things that artists' dreams are made of.

It feels unmannerly to not wonder about the pink rose plant, with its thorny stems and delicate leaves, appearing elegantly, every now and then in N.T.'s paintings  
(as in the painting titled 'Rose Plant')

It can be assumed that these roses are mere symbols inspired from the artist's love for gardening.

On the other hand, it can be supposed that the colour changing, persistent roses have left an inedible mark on the artist's creativity just as the 'Vine has struck a Fibre' in Omar Khayyam's writings.

Either way, these are dreams drawn by the artist's hands.

And again according to N.T., the language expressed with these hands are sometimes bold and clear, sometimes subtle and ambiguous, but never the same as a practical competent person's hands.

ONE OAR TOO MANY  
oil on canvas  
21.5" x 17.5"



16 8 5 27 11 13 13



THE ROSE PLANT  
oil on canvas  
17" x 13.5"

And hands are of much relevance to N.T.'s artistic work.

He calls them the Eloquent Hands.

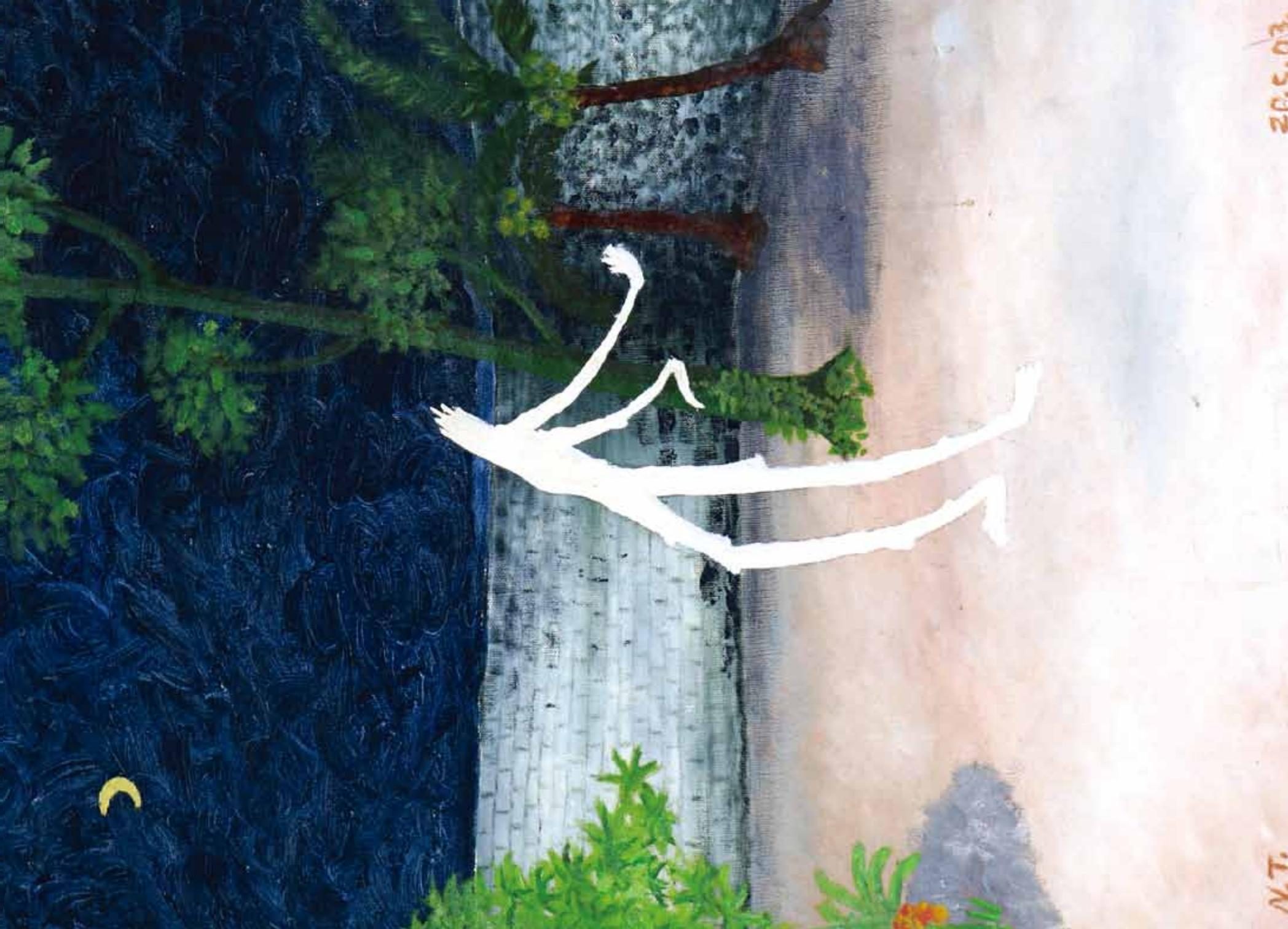
First exhibited at the Esjehi Gallery in Malé in February 1992, the photographic display of N.T.'s Eloquent Hands collection is revived again with his Painted Dreams series.

Here are a series of photographic captures, each telling a story about the human hands; the expressions they make, the tasks assigned to them, and their duty to be lined and scarred, to tell the story of its owners to everyone who comes across them.

Through Eloquent Hands, N.T.'s artwork plays a vital and elegant role in refocusing a light on the details that are too mundane to be noted, as with the general attitude towards hands and other elements in life that are usually taken for granted.

The hands displayed in this work have been photographed not by intent at first, says N.T., but by simply being drawn to them unconsciously, until he realised that this was a notion to follow.

LOONY  
oil on canvas  
21.5" x 15.5"





ONE DREAM  
oil on canvas  
17,5" x 13,5"

NT27 8 05

These photographs captured two or three decades ago show the essence of seemingly far away times.

The objects in the background, the polyester blouses in floral-print, the artistry of rare local objects like the woven mat being handled by tactful hands, and the hazy brownish photo prints that seem to have vanished from exhibition walls, all evoke another time, another feeling.

The Eloquent Hands series by N.T. is a collection to be celebrated so that the times and elements in these photographs are let known to Maldivians over and over again.

These are artistic captures that must be revealed; the precise use of hands that braid long curly hair, the strong grasp of hands that grind the spices, the innocence of each of these moments and the freedom that comes with these moments, attires, and environments.

It shows the co-existence of hands that followed the verses of Quran and hands that lifted in prayers to god, together with hands that delicately adjusted a flower on a woman's hair while her bare neck stretches long to accommodate her feminine movements.



LONG AGO  
oil on canvas  
27.5" x 19"



MY HOUSE  
water color on paper  
16.5" x 13"

It takes an imaginative artist to identify living art in front of them, art that comes in the form of normal unimagined activities.

It takes an artist like N.T. to capture these vivid images some where along his travels three decades ago, process it as art, and exhibit it as a story that needs to be told.

N.T.



The Eloquent Hands tells a story  
that is almost forgotten.

And the Painting Dreams tells of  
stories that still keep on weaving  
as long as dreams are dreamt.

THE PARTY  
oil on canvas  
34" x 21"

NT 28.1.03



THE OTHER HOUSE  
oil on canvas  
23" x 22"

N.T. brings with him works from an era of different attitudes.

His attitude to art is developed over eighty five years of experience, knowledge, artistic inquiry and expression.

His paintings are impulsive in nature.

His photography is conceptual in design.

These impulses and concepts are built upon ideas that can still be considered novel in the spaces of Maldivian art.



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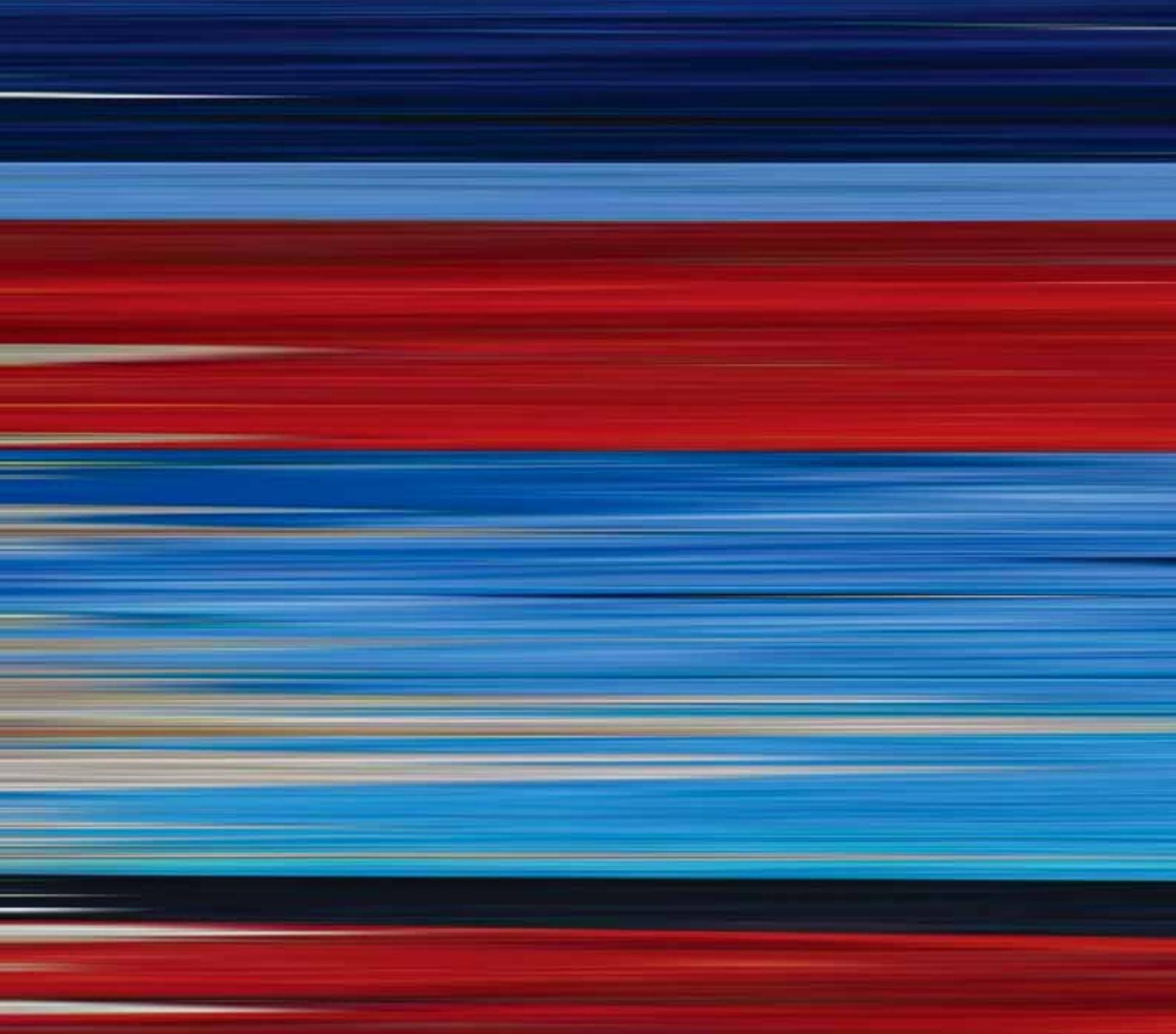
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