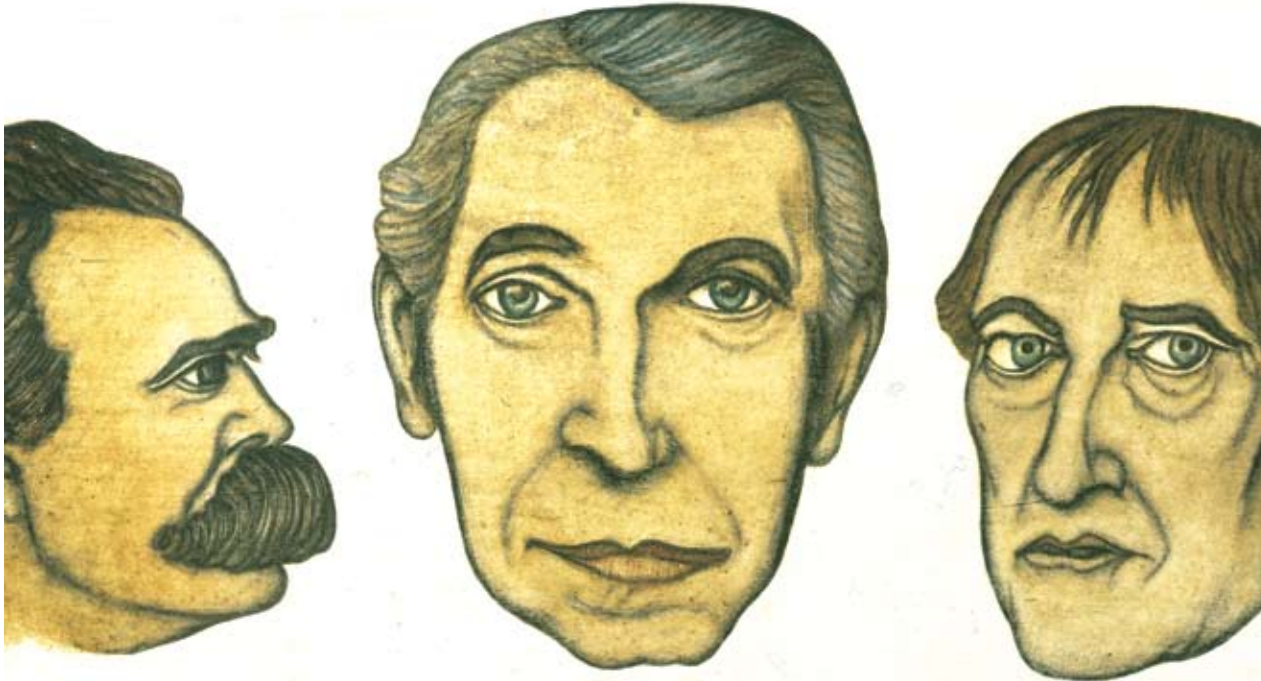


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47 - J. Bataille  
artine 315  
arslan 83

# YÜKSEL ARSLAN

## Visual Interpretations



YÜKSEL ARSLAN

Visual Interpretations

Drawing Papers 78

Essays by  
Brett Littman and Ferit Edgü



1.

# Acknowledgements

The exhibition *Yüksel Arslan: Visual Interpretations* at The Drawing Center is the first major examination of Arslan’s drawings in the United States. All of the work in the show comes from the artist’s personal collection. Arslan, his daughter, Seli, and I have made selections from six series: *Phallisme 2* (1958), *Le Capital* (1973–77), *Influences* (1982–83), *Autoartures* (1985), *L’Homme* (1987–91), and *Nouvelles Influences* (2001–07). This 50-year survey provides an intimate glimpse into Arslan’s thinking, interests, and obsessions, as well as the development of his artistic process that he calls “Artures,” a term he also uses to describe a completed drawing.

I would like to thank Yüksel Arslan and Seli Arslan for their generosity, patience, and support in putting together *Visual Interpretations*. I am also delighted that Ferit Edgü allowed us to reprint his wonderful essay from 1982, an important addition to the sparse writing in English about the artist. The reprint was made possible by Ana Luiza Varella’s deft translation of the original French text. Haldun Dostoglu, from Galeri Nev in Istanbul, deserves special recognition for reconnecting me with Arslan after all these years. I would also like to thank Nadia Ayari for translating Arslan’s autobiography from the *Autoartures* catalog. It has been an invaluable resource that I have referred back to many times while organizing this exhibition.

**Brett Littman**  
Executive Director, The Drawing Center

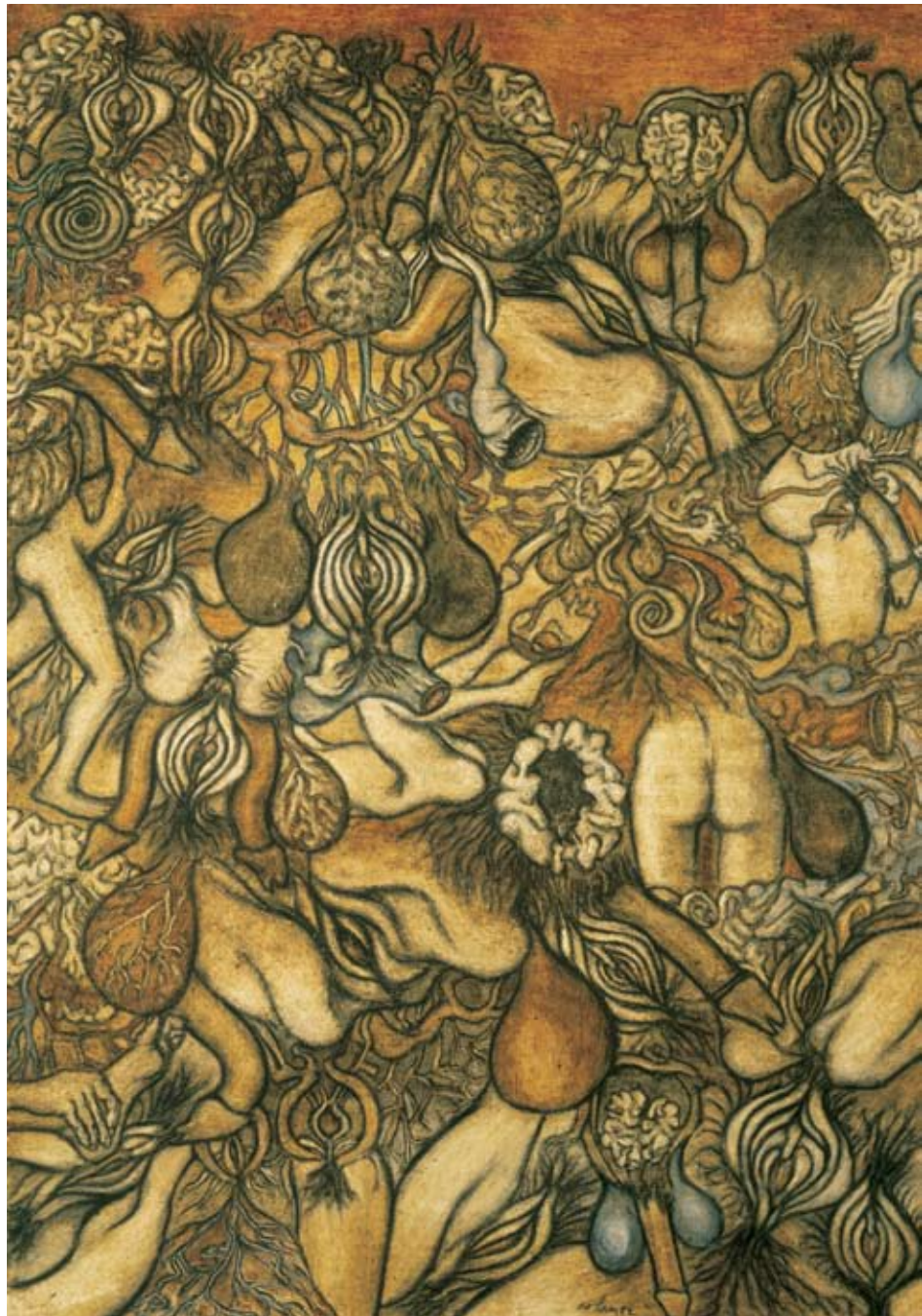








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Yüksel Arslan

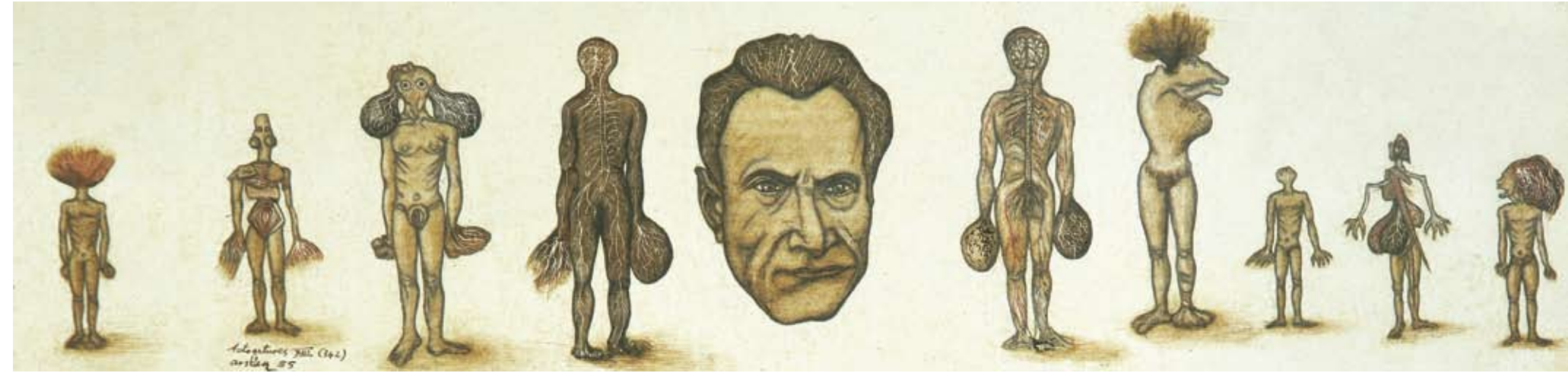
**BRETT LITTMAN**

I first met Yüksel Arslan in Paris in 1993. Our encounter was somewhat random: A friend and I were walking in the flea market at Montreuil and we bumped into Arslan and his wife, Lidy, for whom my friend had worked. They invited us to their home in Saint-Mandé for tea and to take a look at his art. Their very small attic apartment seemed even more claustrophobic because every wall and surface was hung salon-style with Arslan's drawings.





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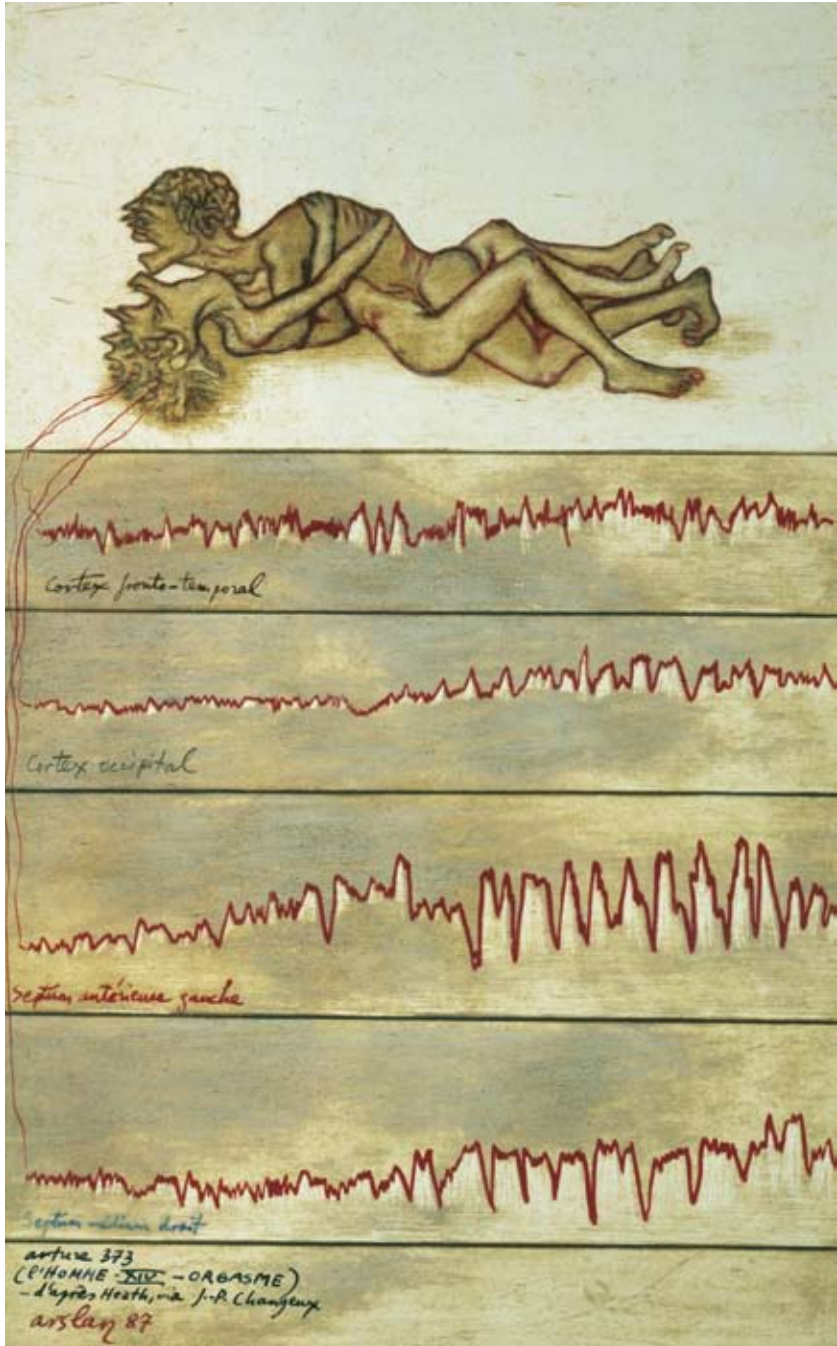


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Looking around the room, I realized his drawings took their inspiration from contemporary music, erotic literature, philosophy, and psychological and economic theory. The subject matter was quite explicit. I was confronted immediately by images of phalluses, vaginas, sex, death, and human psychosis. As a recent philosophy graduate and acolyte of 20th-century French thinking, I felt at home in Arslan's world. We launched into a conversation about Georges Bataille, de Sade, Nietzsche, Erik Satie, Karl Marx, Freud, and Art Brut. Arslan insisted that I take two antique books from his vast collection: one about children's art and the other about folk art. He told me that this gift "summed up our conversation." He also gave me several of his own catalogs, which smelled like the cigars he smoked.

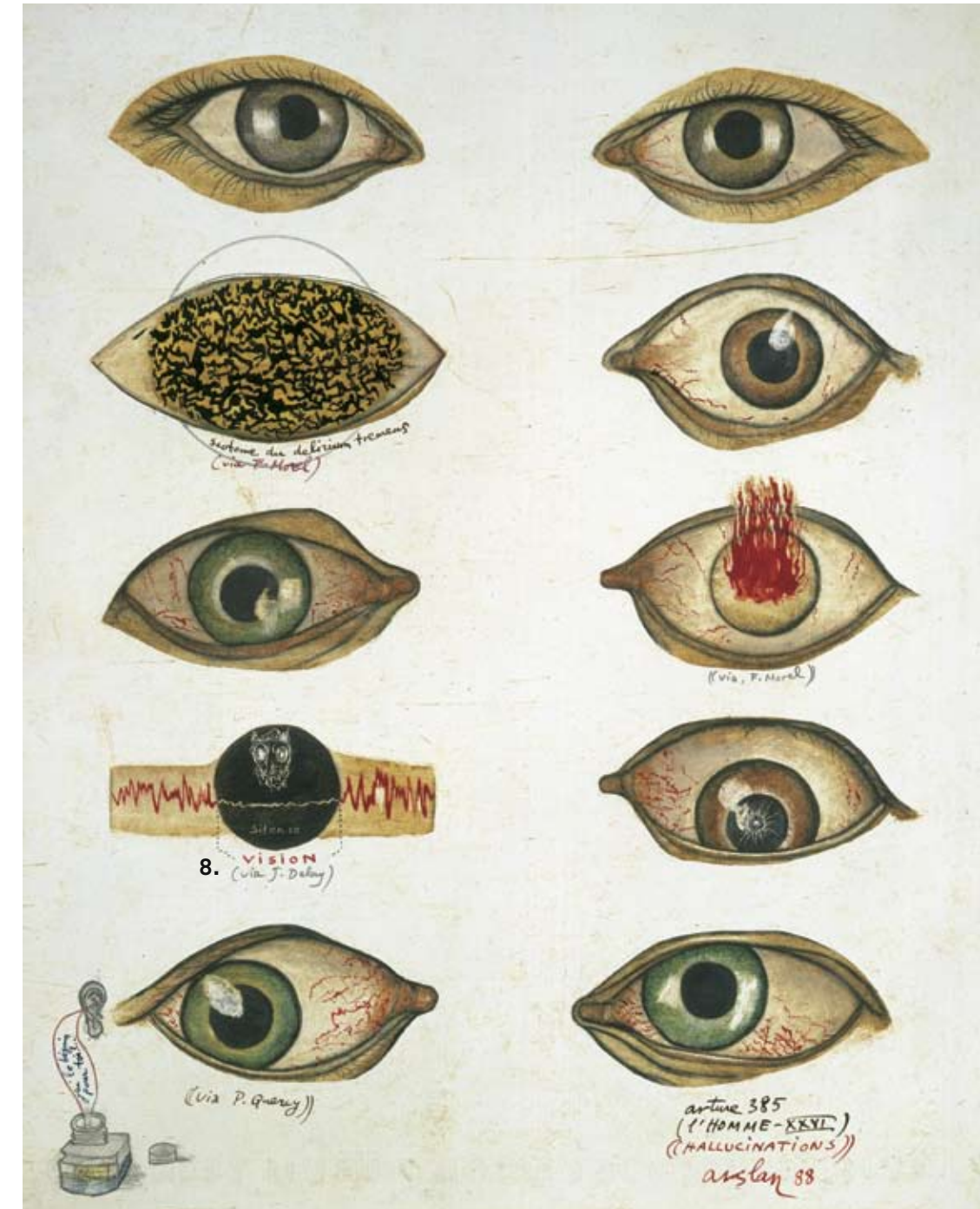
Since that visit I have often thought about Arslan. Unfortunately, I did not keep in touch after our brief encounter but the books and catalogs he gave me remained on my bookshelf, and I often take them down to look at his provocative and largely unclassifiable art. His work reminds me of a time in my own life when my pursuit of art and matters of the mind was just beginning and the world of ideas had opened up for me.

When I became Executive Director of The Drawing Center in May 2007, I began to think about organizing an exhibition of Arslan's work. Searching the Web, I found a gallery in Istanbul that recently had shown his work. I e-mailed to see if he was still alive and active and found that not only was Arslan still making art, but that he lived in the same place in Paris I had visited all those years ago.

In September 2007, Arslan, his daughter, Seli, and I met again at the apartment in Saint-Mandé—exactly as I remembered it, with the smell of freshly smoked cigars and cigarettes clinging to the walls. And I could swear that not one of those strange and wonderful drawings had been moved in the 14 years since my first visit. Arslan and I had a long discussion about the work, his process, and whether or not he wanted to show in the United States. He told me which pieces were important and which were masterpieces.

When I came back on the second day, Arslan showed me his archives, in large paper cartons stored behind his couch and under the desk in his office. We made our way through work





from the early 1960s to the present. Each drawing had a story about when it was made and what inspired it. We ultimately agreed on 27 drawings that would be sent to New York for an exhibition in April 2008. My only concern is that for the next couple of months his walls will have ghostly spots where these drawings have hung for so long.

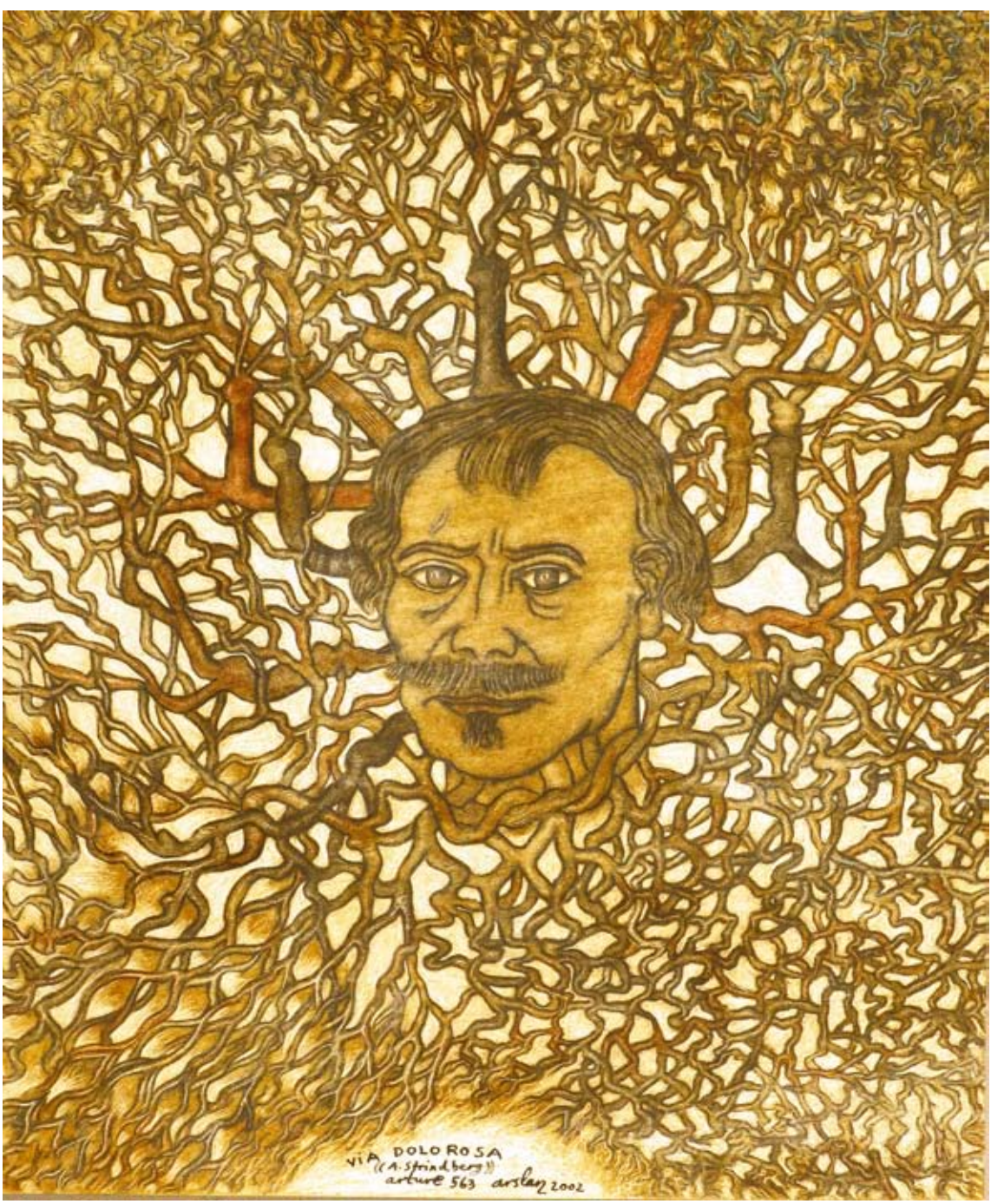
Arslan's work interests me for a variety of reasons. He hasn't followed trends or chased commercial success in the art world. He sells his work from time to time to serious collectors and galleries but that is not his main impulse for making art. His work straddles East and West, hovering between Istanbul, where he was born in 1933, and Paris, where he has lived since 1961. His visual iconography isn't entirely occidental or "oriental" but occupies a tertiary space between these two cultural poles. He is not a Surrealist, even though his earliest artistic association is with André Breton. It was Breton who first invited him to exhibit in a Surrealist show Paris in 1959 but at that time Arslan could not get his drawings out of Turkey due to export restrictions. Arslan has been a Marxist, a Nietzschean, and an intellectual. Above all, he says, he is an artist who "sweats art from his pores."

Making an Arture is a slow process. Before he draws, he reads books on a variety of topics, takes notes, and makes preliminary sketches in his “codex.” His research for a series of drawings can take one or two years. When he is ready he prepares his paper, which is made from earth, honey, egg whites, fat, marrow, urine, grated soap, grass, blood, and tobacco juice which are boiled together and poured over the surface of the paper. Once the paper is fixed with the color, he burnishes the surface with stones, yellow ocher, and flint. After that, he outlines what he is going to draw with a hard pencil, and then takes stones, ocher, earth, and India ink to fill in the details. The drawing is burnished again to fix the additional colors. Early works like *Circulation du Capital* (1973–74) took months of painstaking work to complete. Today Arslan has perfected his technique and he can complete a drawing in a week’s to a month’s time. Once a drawing is finished, Arslan numbers each work serially and documents its existence in his *cahier*. He continues to work until he feels that he has completely visualized the ideas he wanted to explore. At that point, he starts reading again and begins a new period of research for inspiration.





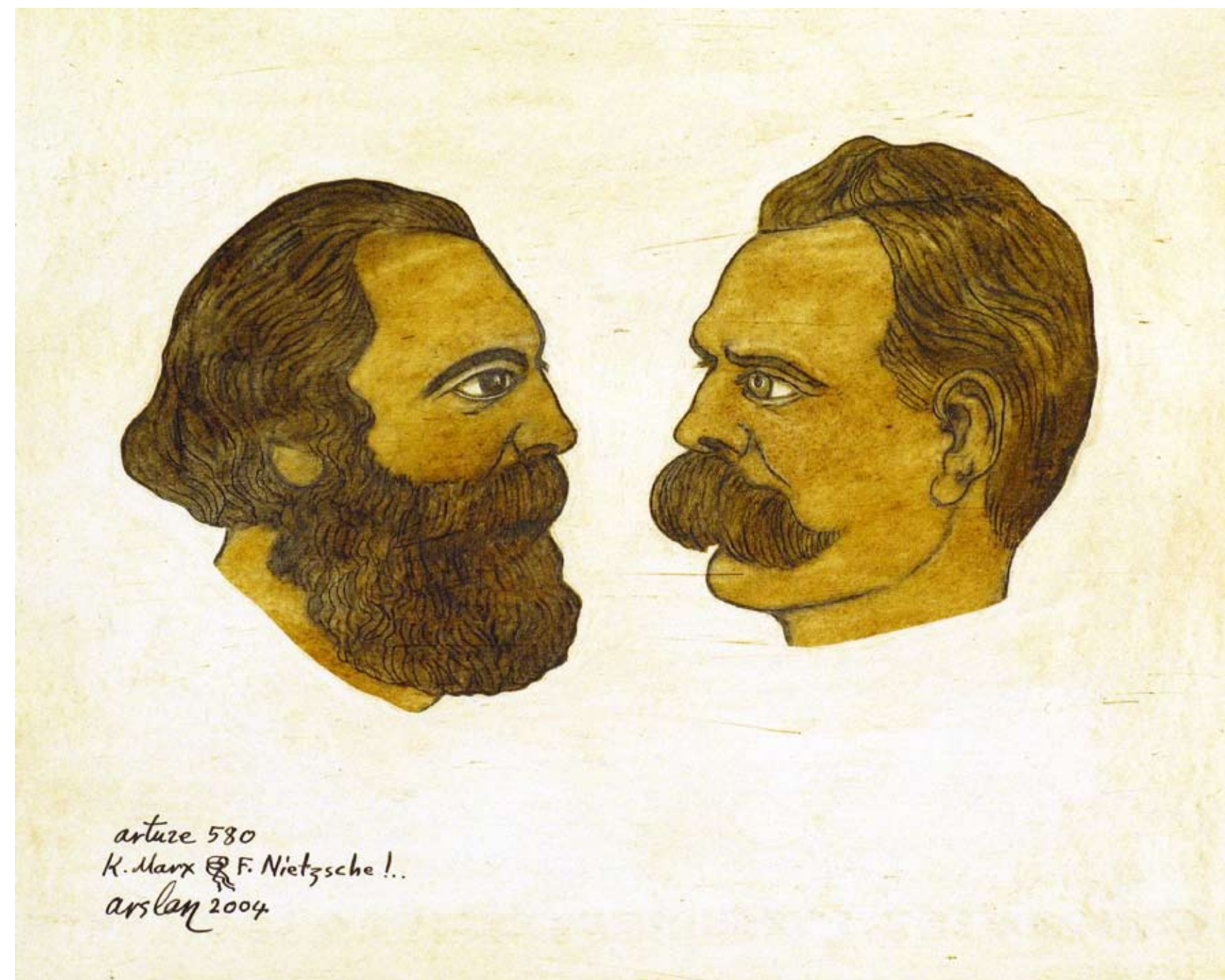




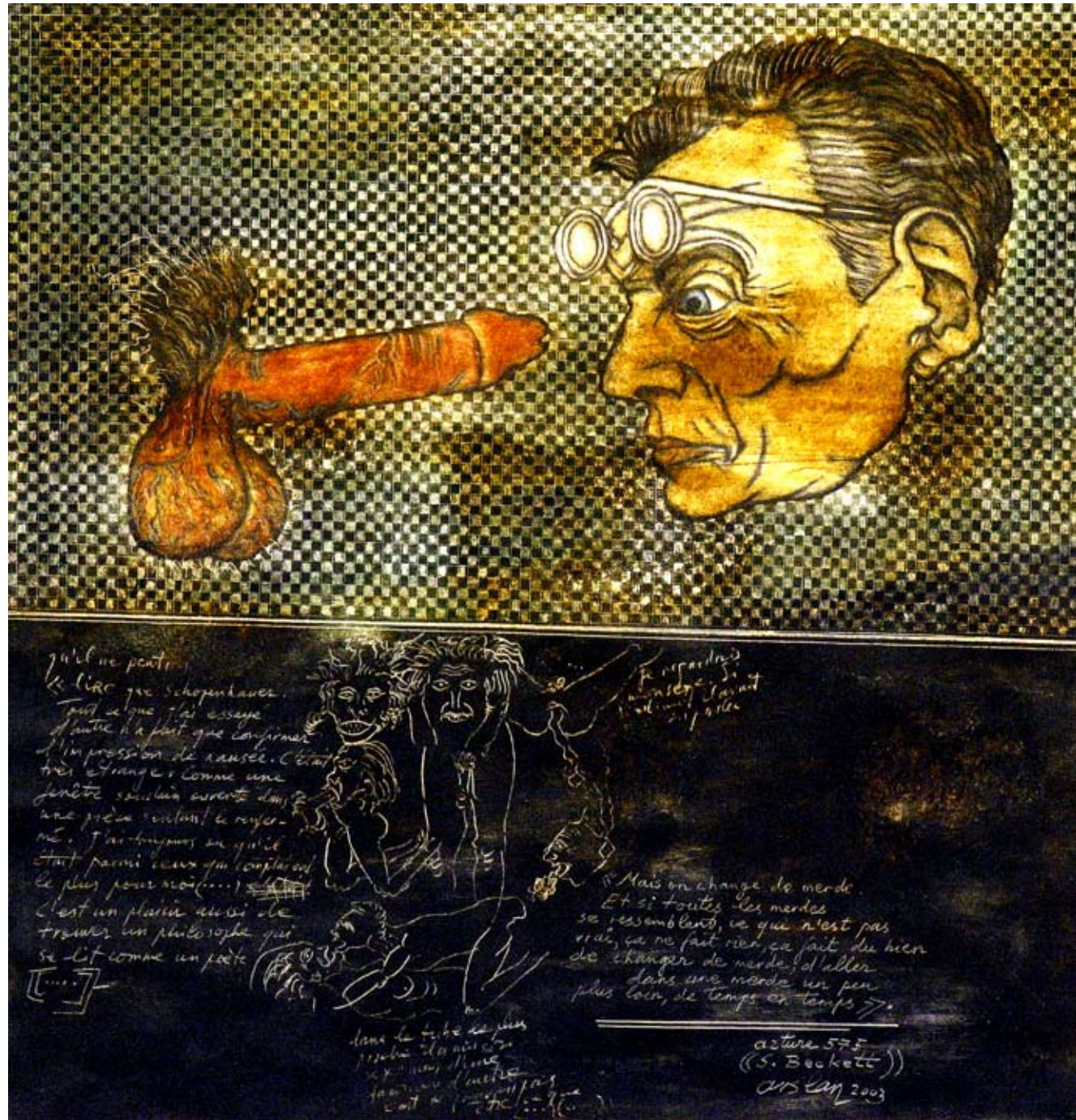
Arslan's drawings are dreams—dreams populated by historical figures, landscapes, body parts, architecture, musical notes and words. Direct and indirect visual references to Antonin Artaud, Bataille, Samuel Beckett, Morton Feldman, Langston Hughes, Guy de Maupassant, Henri Michaux, Nietzsche, Satie, Kurt Schwitters, and Iannis Xenakis float in and out of view. His drawings are profoundly intertwined with the pantheon of radical thinkers, poets, musicians, writers, and philosophers.

I want to be clear, however, that this work is not homage or illustration. Arslan's drawing process is like psychoanalysis. Each preparatory book is read in microscopic detail in an attempt to reveal unconscious desires, tropes, and images imbedded in the language. Yet the fundamental difference between Arslan and the therapist is that instead providing diagnosis for the patient, he captures, interprets, and contains the words, notes, poems, and theories that have come to shape his life.

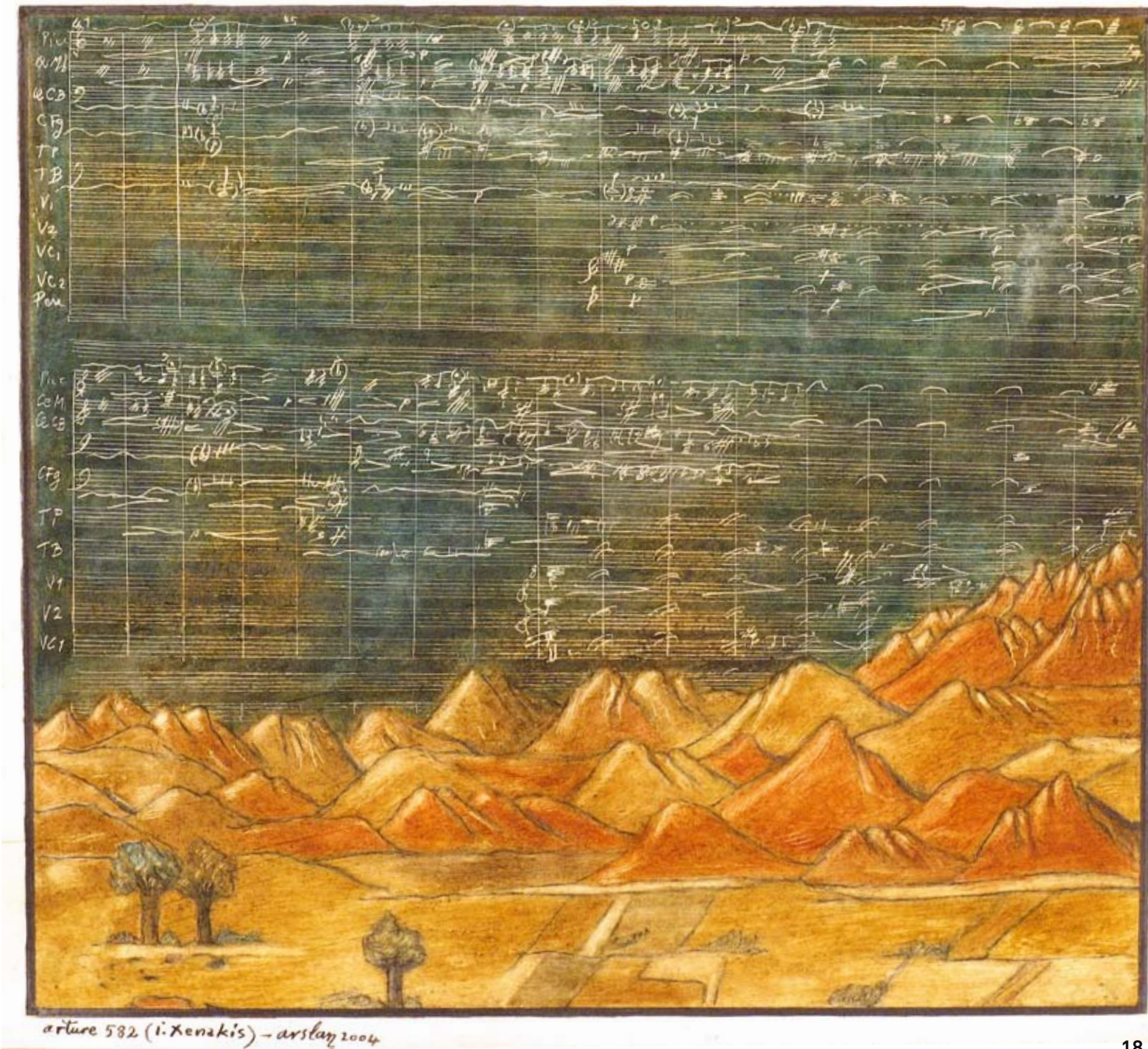












18.



19.



*Phallisme 2*, 1958  
Handmade pigments on paper  
15<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> x 24<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> inches (39 x 62 cm)  
**Plate no. 1**

*Arture 89*, 1965  
Handmade pigments on paper  
14 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 34 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches (36 x 88 cm)

*Le Capital: Circulation du Capital, Arture XXIII (175)*, 1973–74  
Handmade pigments, pencil, and ink on paper  
28<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 33<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches (72 x 85 cm)  
Photo by Cathy Carver  
**Plate no. 2**

*Arture 186*, 1977  
Handmade pigments on paper  
29 x 43<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches (74 x 110 cm)  
Photo by Cathy Carver  
**Plate no. 3**

*Influences: Sade en est encore la victime!*, *Arture 277*, 1982  
Handmade pigments on paper  
11<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 8<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches (30 x 21 cm)  
**Plate no. 4**

*Influences: G. Bataille, Arture 315*, 1983  
Handmade pigments on paper  
11<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 8<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches (30 x 21 cm)  
**Front cover**

*Influences: B. Péret, Arture 312*, 1983  
Handmade pigments, pencil, and ink on paper  
11<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 8<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches (30 x 21 cm)

*Autoartures XIII: A. Artaud, Arture 342*, 1985  
Handmade pigments on paper  
4<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 19<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches (12 x 50 cm)  
**Plate no. 6**

*Autoartures XVI: H. Michaux (Aliénateurs!)*, *Arture 345*, 1985  
Handmade pigments on paper  
6 x 18<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches (15 x 46 cm)  
**Plate no. 5**

*Autoartures XVIII (347)*, 1985  
Handmade pigments on paper  
8<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> x 12<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches (22 x 33 cm)  
**Plate no. 7**

*L'Homme XIV, Orgasme, Arture 373*, 1987  
Handmade pigments and ink on paper  
11<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 7<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches (30 x 18 cm)  
**Plate no. 8**

*L'Homme XXVI: Hallucinations, Arture 385*, 1988  
Handmade pigments and ink on paper  
13<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 10<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches (34 x 27 cm)  
**Plate no. 10**

## LIST OF WORKS

*L'Homme XLVII: Schizophrènes, Arture 406*, 1989  
Handmade pigments and ink on paper  
15<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 13<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches (40 x 35 cm)  
**Plate no. 9**

*L'Homme 65: Hypnose, Arture 424*, 1991  
Handmade pigments and ink on paper  
15<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 35<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches (40 x 90 cm)  
**Plate no. 11**

*Nouvelles Influences: Pes et Wals, Arture 550*, 2001  
Handmade pigments and ink on paper  
13 x 14<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches (33 x 36 cm)  
**Plate no. 12**

*Nouvelles Influences: Maupassant, Arture 557*, 2002  
Handmade pigments on paper  
13<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 13<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> (35 x 35cm)  
**Plate no. 14**

*Nouvelles Influences: Via Dolorosa, Arture 563*, 2002  
Handmade pigments on paper  
11<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 9<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches (30 x 25 cm)  
**Plate no. 13**

*Nouvelles Influences: Beckett, Arture 575*, 2003  
Handmade pigments on paper  
12 x 11<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> inches (30 x 29 cm)  
**Plate no. 16**

*Nouvelles Influences: John Cage, Arture 593*, 2004  
Handmade pigments and ink on paper  
17<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 15 inches (45 x 37 cm)  
**Back cover**

*Nouvelles Influences: Raymond Queneau, Arture 589*, 2004  
Handmade pigments and ink on paper  
11<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> x 17 inches (29 x 43 cm)  
**Plate no. 17**

*Nouvelles Influences: K. Marx + F. Nietzsche, Arture 580*, 2004  
Handmade pigments on paper  
9 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 11<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches (23 x 30 cm)  
**Plate no. 15**

*Nouvelles Influences: I. Xenakis, Arture 582*, 2004  
Handmade pigments on paper  
10 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 11<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> (26 x 30 cm)  
**Plate no. 18**

*Nouvelles Influences: Langston Hughes, Arture 601*, 2005  
Handmade pigments on paper  
10 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> x 13<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches (27 x 34 cm)

*Nouvelles Influences: Morton Feldman, Arture 613*, 2006  
Handmade pigments and ink on paper  
18<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 11<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches (46 x 30 cm)  
Photo by Cathy Carver  
**Plate no. 19**

*Nouvelles Influences: Eric Satie, Arture 628*, 2007  
Handmade pigments and ink on paper  
11<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> x 8<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches (29 x 21 cm)

*Nouvelles Influences: Italo svevo et John Randolph Dos Passos, Arture 619*, 2006  
Handmade pigments and ink on paper  
9<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> x 9<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> inches (24 x 24 cm)

*Nouvelles Influences: Kurt Schwitters, Arture 605*, 2006  
Handmade pigments on paper  
11<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 8<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches (30 x 21 cm)  
Photo by Cathy Carver  
**Plate no. 20**

Unless noted otherwise, all photos by Cengiz Tacer.



**Edward Hallam Tuck Publication Program**

This is number 76 of the Drawing Papers, a series of publications documenting The Drawing Center’s exhibitions and public programs and providing a forum for the study of drawing.

Joanna Berman Ahlberg, *Managing Editor*

**Acknowledgements**

*Yüksel Arslan: Visual Interpretations* is made possible, in part, by The American Turkish Society.

Additional support is provided by members of the Drawing Room, a patron circle founded to support innovative exhibitions presented in The Drawing Center’s project gallery: Devon Dikeou, Mr. and Mrs. Henry R. Kravis, Jill Lear, Louisa Stude Sarofim, Elizabeth Tops and Arnie Lizan, John C. Whitehead, and Isabel Stainow Wilcox.

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APR 18 08

MAY 15 08

arture 533  
("John Cage")  
arslan 2004

Curated  
by Brett Littman