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Author/s:

Cribb, G;Da Silva, J;Lazaro, D;MCQUILTEN, G;Sequeira, D;Teale, P

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**David
Sequeira**

**All the things
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All the things I should have said that I never said

All the things I should have said that I never said is a grouping of three large scale works, the genesis of which began as an enquiry into the relationship between colour, geometry and human experience. After three decades, I am still learning about this relationship. Part essay and part artist statement, the purpose of this text is to share some thoughts about the concepts that underpin my practice. Far from conclusive, I have written this text to explore rather than define the work that I make and the ideas that sustain me. The other texts, generously authored by Desmond Lazaro, José Da Silva, and Grace McQuilten, reveal how this exploration manifests in each of the specific works.

I think about the 'small acts' which lie at the heart of my work – painting minute daubs of gouache on paper, combining coloured fabric for clothing, selecting and displaying thrift store vases – as allusions to grand ideas about interconnectedness, wonder, speculation and the nature and experience of reality. *Song Cycle* is a growing series of works on paper in which intensely coloured diagrammatic forms are painted in gouache on music manuscript paper and anchored by the title written in pencil at the bottom of each sheet. The bespoke kurtas that comprise *untitled, India* are constructed either from deeply saturated coloured fabric or digitally printed with black and white photographs.¹ Collectively the kurtas form a personal history of India, contextualised within the realm of geometric colour. *History and Infinity* is a shelf-based installation of disparate paintings (by other artists) and coloured vases. The vases and paintings are carefully arranged to highlight the rich tonal variation of the vases and the dominant colours in each painting.

The title of this publication and the exhibition that it accompanies, *All the things I should have said that I never said*, refers to an accumulation of ideas, themes and conversations about art, history, representation, museums and my own presence amidst all of this. Sourced from the lyrics of a song by Kate Bush, the title suggests the reflection that emerges from rethinking, second guessing, doubt and anxiety.² As a brown skinned Indian born Australian committed to the custodianship and development of visual arts culture in this country, navigating the values implicit within workplaces that I have inhabited – studios, galleries and museums – has been uncomfortable at times. Although I did not always have the space to express my thoughts about this, across my 30-year career as an artist and curator, there are many things about selection, display, history and representation that 'I should have said that I never said'.

The capacity for colour and geometry to articulate complexities associated with this 'unsaid' has provided me with fertile (and relatively unexplored) terrain. Much of my practice has involved combining the languages of colour and geometry in pursuit of contemplative experiences. Thinking about colour and geometry as being independent of specific media is an important part of my process. More specifically, whilst my art practice takes many forms, the materials with which I engage are colour and geometry. Whilst colour can be replicated, the experience of colour resides with the individual. Combined with the organisational aspect of geometry, this is a powerful metaphor for articulating personal and shared understandings of the world. For me, colour and geometry form an access to profound considerations of multiple histories, infinity, endlessness and the cosmos.

1. The kurta is a long loose shirt often worn by men in India.

2. Kate Bush, *This woman's work*, recorded 1988 released by EMI

3. This understanding of colour is derived from *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*. Clarendon Press, 2005.

4. Michael Auping, *Abstract Geometry, Painting: Selected Geometric Abstract Painting in America since 1945*. New York, H.N. Abrams, 1989, p22

5. Sufism can be understood as the mystical/ inward expression of Islam.

6. Laleh Bakhtiar, *Sufi, expressions of the mystic quest*. Thames & Hudson, 2004, p24.

7. Briohny Fer, *The Infinite Line: Re-Making Art after Modernism*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 2004, p58

By colour, I mean the use of all hues in painting and other visual art forms as distinct from composition, form, light and shade. In this dictionary definition, these hues are the visual perceptual property corresponding in humans to the categories of red, blue, green etc.³ Given that perception lies with the individual, my red, blue, green etc. is not your red, blue, green etc. In the three works discussed in this publication, colour is applied with little or no blending or shading within an articulated space. By applying only one opaque tone of colour in each shape, I can highlight the visual power of that single tone in relation to the other singly toned shapes. The use of flat colour allows a closer inspection of the interaction of single toned shapes within the same pictorial plane.

For me, geometry is an examination of form, which provides access to understanding space, time and interval. In my works, geometry refers to the use of the straight line and elemental shapes such as the rectangle, circle and square. Curator Michael Auping states '*Geometry is seldom, if ever the subject of a painting, but rather a means to a variety of ends.*'⁴ For me, geometry is a structural device that enables the articulation of my interests in harmony, reflection and unity. In the paintings, garments and sculptural installation discussed in this publication, geometry is used as a device that 'contains' colour.

My work can be understood as an exploration of the relationship between colour, geometry and contemplation. The term 'contemplation' comes from the Latin root *templum* which means to cut or divide. The prefix *con* means against or not. For me, contemplation is a kind of thinking that connects, unifies and facilitates a sense of wholeness. Sufic understandings of contemplation have played a large part in the development of my art practice.⁵ Psychologist and writer Laleh Bakhtiar proposes that '*In contemplation, one concentrates on a visual image or an idea which must have a divine quality, that is, one of the positive qualities of the cosmos such as the virtues of charity, humility or truthfulness.*'⁶ I am interested in making work that alludes to the interconnectedness of life – that contextualises individual experience within a consideration of endlessness. In this light, my practice has involved a constant inquiry into the complexity and simplicity required to enable contemplation.

Each of the works discussed throughout this book is comprised of multiple units that are connected through the repetition of colour and geometry. I am interested in seriality and repetition of form and their association with the idea of 'variations within variations', which can be linked with concepts of infinity. Each of these works can be understood as a series of objects that can be continually rearranged and expanded. The notion of seriality suggests consideration of 'the whole' and yet, through seriality, 'the whole' is never complete because there are always variations within variations to be imagined and/ or realised. Historian, critic and curator Briohny Fer observes, '*The thing about infinity is that it is not a thing: it exists only in the imagination...Infinity after all, is not an object, but something that exists in the mind as that which is beyond representation.*'⁷ For me, there is a symbolic quality about the 'incomplete wholeness' implicit in seriality that signals an inexhaustible range of possibilities. Making work in series allows me to engage in the progression or evolution of a concept. '*Seriality is a time based strategy that privileges*

8. Briohny Fer, *The Infinite Line: Re-Making Art after Modernism*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 2004, p68

9. Frederick Turner, *Beauty, the value of values*. University of Virginia Press, 1991, p5

time over space.'⁸ I think about each component within a work or series of works as a moment within an infinite number of moments. Accordingly, each component can be thought of as a context for the works' other components, and the series can be understood to represent an idea unfolding over time.

Much of my work involves the precise placement of individual colours to form a harmonic cohesion that I associate with beauty. I think about beauty as arising when each colour contributes its individual properties to form a visual vibration. This vibration is not designed to be illustrative, but rather to evoke sensation. For me, the question of whether an object is beautiful or not is dependent upon not only what it looks like, but also its capacity to engage viewers in a consideration of life beyond the object itself. Philosopher Frederick Turner explains that '*Beauty always opens a new space... That new space is also a new time.*'⁹ I think about beauty as connected with revelation, the emergence of ideas, the removal of limitations and the experience of newness.

Through the lens of colour and geometry, concepts of (art) history have an expansive and structured looseness that I find beautiful. Questions about the value and significance of works of art and other objects are less easily answered by single voices and the process of selection and display is less reliant on definitive interpretations. Embracing a range of expressions, this lens allows me to make nonlinear connections across geographies, cultures and art forms that render time as malleable. Making art in this context – continuing the exercises in colour and geometry that underpin my practice, regardless of their manifestation – is part of a universal exploration of what art is and what it can be.

Foreword
by Georgia Cribb & Penny Teale

Informed by stories from across our region, Bunjil Place Gallery's exhibition program celebrates the possibility of visual art culture as a multiplicity of experiences and viewpoints. In this light, the commissioning of new work by artists of varied backgrounds and creative specialisations is an important aspect of our program. It is with great pleasure therefore, we present *All the things I should have said that I never said*, a major exhibition by David Sequeira that offers insight into the Melbourne-based artist's prolific range and application.

As an Indian born Australian artist, curator and academic who has been a leading voice on art and diaspora in Australia for thirty years, Sequeira sits within a curious position, whereby his knowledge and experience across these disciplines affords a space for reciprocity and for testing the ideas and structures of the mainstream art world - from both outside and within it. Featuring painting, sculptural installation, fashion and performance *All the things I should have said that I never said*, reveals the ways in which Sequeira holds a lens to the notions of authorship and art history, as contestable and malleable concepts that shift across place, time and space.

For this exhibition, Sequeira has brought together three cycles of work, each comprised of multiple elements which are unified through their repetition of form, colour and geometry. His use of colour is driven by the idea that each person's experience of a colour is unique and cannot be replicated or described in words. Each grouping of elements can be expanded and rearranged over time in response to the spaces in which they are displayed. Collectively, these cycles can be understood as an open-ended discourse about art, museums, human experience and the everyday.

We are especially excited to have supported the development of *untitled, India, 2022*, an ambitious new installation of 56 bespoke kurtas that combine Sequeira's signature monochromatic colour blocking with black and white photography of India's past. In our discussions prior to *All the things I should have said that I never said*, Sequeira proposed that volunteers from our community be invited to model the kurtas in a runway performance. On the evening of 8 May, a formidable event unfolded, where community and artist, fashion and bodies, movement and music, colour and light coalesced – revealing an incredible complexity, depth and beauty – in an inspired celebration of Indian diaspora in Australia. Models of Indian descent from a range of generations wore Sequeira's kurtas in a fully choreographed performance featuring all the tropes of a fashion show. Incorporating a live soundtrack by veena virtuoso and composer Hari Sivanesan and producer Amin Payne, this unforgettable performance, of which we are immensely proud, was greatly received.

We look forward to sharing *All the things I should have said that I never said* with the Bunjil Place community and beyond.

Georgia Cribb is the Director, Bunjil Place Gallery
Penny Teale is the Curator, Bunjil Place Gallery

Thank you

Bunjil Place Gallery extends gratitude to our community who embraced and made the runway performance a reality, with a special thanks to Hari Sivanesan, Amin Payne and Bunjil Place staff across all discipline areas. The performance, exhibition and extensive event program is a direct result of the breadth of their expertise.

This publication has been generously supported by Chancellery International, The University of Melbourne. We thank the contributing authors Desmond Lazaro, José Da Silva and Grace McQuilten for their considered words that so eloquently articulate the depth of David's practice. We thank photographers Kim Tonelli, Stephen McCallum, Leah Jing McIntosh and Christian Capurro, alongside filmmakers Tiny Empire Collective and graphic designer Dom Forde of Forde + Nicol who have lovingly contributed to the documentation of this multifaceted project.

Finally, it is with sincere and heartfelt thanks that we acknowledge the brilliance of David Sequeira. We thank him for his openness, trust, intellect and humour. Through all aspects of this project's development, from idea to reality, we have gained tremendously, both professionally and personally and we are deeply grateful for his energy, candour and creative vision.

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Lenders to the exhibition:
Greg Creek
Megan Evans
Nusra Latif Qureshi
Charles Nodrum Gallery, Melbourne
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My deepest thanks to the Bunjil Place Gallery team: Director Georgia Cribb and Curator Penny Teale for embracing my work and ideas so generously. Education and Audience Engagement Officer Sarah Lyons for generating such meaningful connections with the broader community. Registrar Catherine Bennetts-Cash for taking custody of my work. All of the front of house, production, screen and installation staff for their magical stewardship of this project.



1. My teacher was the painter Ghulam Mohammed Sheikh b 1937

2. Zoom discussion with David Sequeira 2 May 2022

3. ibid

Being with David Sequeira's Song Cycle by Desmond Lazaro

I trained within the tradition of miniature painting in Rajasthan for more than 20 years, of which half of that time was working directly under the apprenticeship of a master whose family had been practicing for about seven generations. Miniaturists normally experience work in a very physical sense. Most contemporary art is about being confronted, and how you either stand up to it or whether you get lost in it. Originally Indian miniature paintings were made in portfolios, presented as unbound books for the Mughal courts. They were shared by natural light during the day and by candlelight at night. You would take the painting into your physical space. Consumers of these works did not have to go to it – it was brought to them.

By the late 20th century, the practice of miniature painting in India, once reserved for royal courts, had become a staple for the tourist trade. Working with miniaturists in Udaipur for the last 25 years, David Sequeira has engaged with this shift in values. Sequeira's painting cycle, *Songs*, reflect a deep, almost genetic, connection with those traditions. The *Songs* have an affinity with Tantra painting and Sequeira is profoundly impacted not only by its aesthetics, but more importantly by its potential for transcendence. The rudimentary materials used to make these works, and the simplicity of their geometric organisation are the resonance of, or the access to, a spiritual experience. Coming from a miniaturist background, for me, Sequeira's *Songs* are about distilling. When looking at a *Song*, I feel it talking to me, and the whisper quickly becomes a shout. My teacher always said, 'Learn the tradition and then let go of it.'¹ In the *Songs*, Sequeira has let go – and now they've come back. They reflect a freedom that is not bound by the traditions of miniature or tantric painting. Sequeira is finding another space for his knowledge and perhaps this is a body of work that could have only been made outside of India (in Australia and in Melbourne) where he is not beholden to miniature and Tantra conventions.

Looking at the *Songs*, there are also affinities with Josef Albers, Sonia Delaunay, and Tibetan mandalas. We can unpack all of this, and it would be a delightful and interesting exercise, but it's hitting the target and missing the point. My feeling is that in order for Sequeira to make the *Songs* he remains deeply aware of these knowledges, but he has let go and he has jumped. The *Songs* emerged from Sequeira's enquiry into the essence of being an artist. His question, 'What's the smallest act that I can do, that has the biggest impact?' has fueled his practice for 30 years.² He wants his vibrations of color and ripples of tonality, to live like they're breathing and moving, like there's an entire world in each tiny composition of circle and line. As Sequeira states, 'For me it's just such a small act, except I can never get to the bottom of it because there's always another variation. There's always another rhythm. There's always another pulse of colour.'³

Sequeira is in this other space. With the *Songs*, it's almost like he's arrived somewhere. I don't know where the fuck that is and I wonder why this has not been given a space in contemporary art discourse. Do you come at it as, latter day tantric, contemporary practice? Do you look at it as a diasporic art? I think, no. It's more. It's something else. I don't know what that something else is and I wish I could nail it, but I can't.

For each *Song*, the lines of the manuscript sheets form an important geometry – the underlying structure of whatever comes on top of it. Sequeira allows the musical note sheet to be that first, and then this *thing* gets laid on top of it as if it's

an orchestrated move. His colour opens up a hold for me, a dynamic about rhythm and cosmology. Cosmology, in terms of alchemy, has always suggested that the seven visible planets are based on actual material colours because of the chemical and biochemical associations. For instance, there are seven metals which have always been associated with the planets, and each one has a particular hierarchy of colour that goes with it. Perhaps this is something into which Sequeira is falling? Is it something inherent in him, that allows him to enter that space really comfortably?

Looking beyond the *Songs* to Sequeira's other works, colour is obviously an integral part of his practice. I got involved in cosmology because I wanted to know the nature of colour in relations to planets. Sequeira, in a very different way, seems to be hitting in a similar kind of a direction – an exploration of the ineffable via colour and geometry. It seems the *Songs* have the ability to transmit, they are gateways. Along with beauty, this is a can of worms in most contemporary art discourse. When I'm amidst his work, I'm interested in exploring what *that's* about in (his) art, and I suspect that much of this ineffability results from his geometry.

What do you do with a compass? ...actually, it's called a pair of compasses. A pair implies duality. It's either opened or closed and it's either one or it's two. One of them has a sharp point, and when you draw a circle, you make a slight indentation or pin prick. In other words, you are shifting from one plane to another – if you believe there is another dimension beyond the one that in which we're living. It's a direct engagement with something of which we are a part but remains other than us. In many cosmologies, there is no separation between you and the stars, earth, planets and heavens. It's a part of you. Making art is that – it's a direct engagement with the absence of that separation. That is the gateway, the portal. The *Songs* have the ability to transcend this moment into multiple moments. I'm not so interested in the surface. I'm interested in what is speaking to me through the surface. What is this combination of colour saying to me right now? What sense do I need in order to engage with it? What is the quality of this silence?

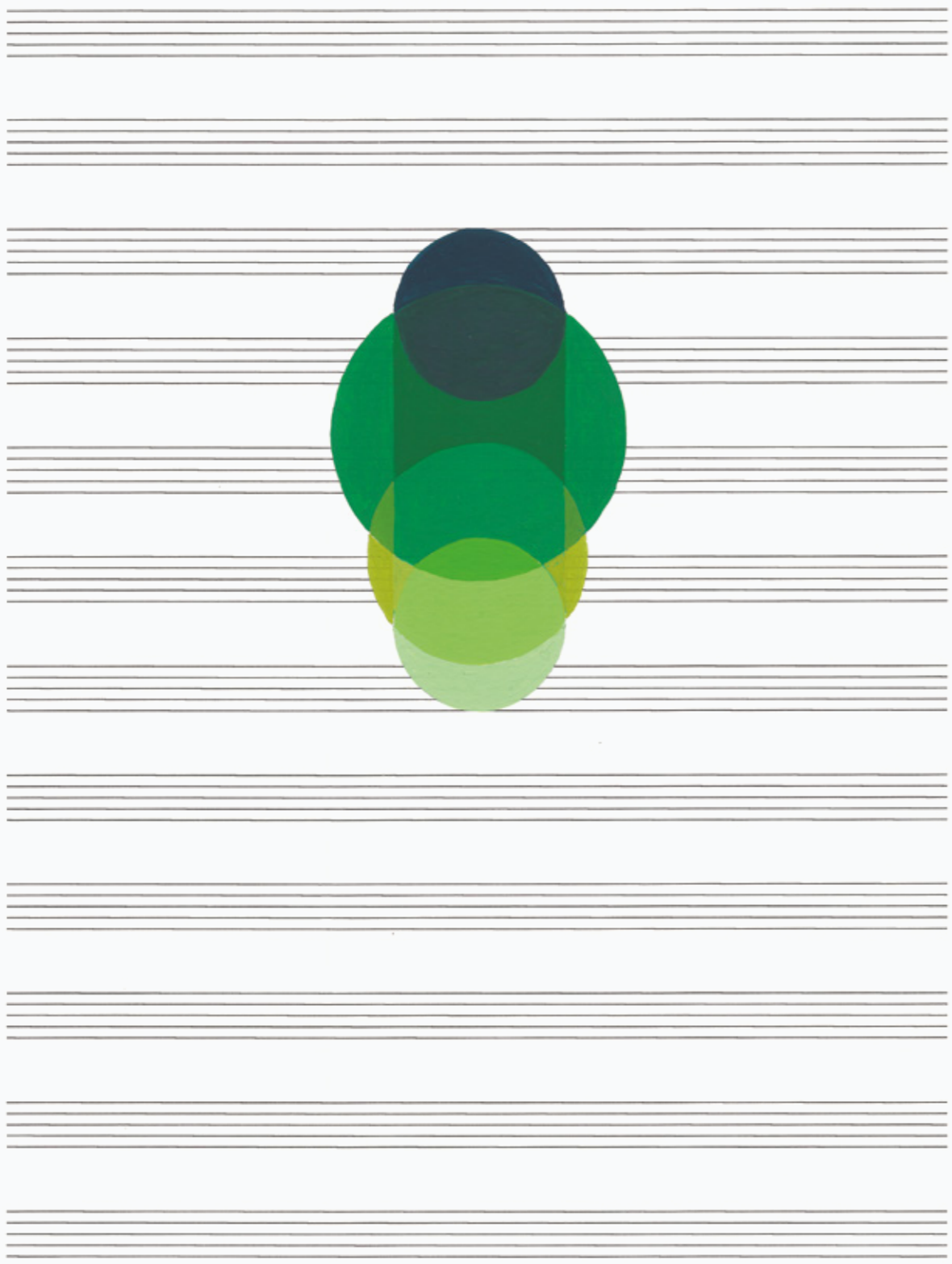
Currently at around 400, Sequeira's ongoing series of *Songs* had a particular currency during COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020 and 2021. At this time, his social media posts of the *Songs* attracted the attention of other artists and collectors, and they were shipped around the world. 'Lockdown seemed to be a time when the whole world was looking inwardly. The *Songs* are not big, epic, narrative paintings. I think of them as modest works that deal with grand ideas. It was very moving for me that I could be located in my studio that's smaller than 20 square meters, in Melbourne, and that what I could do, what I made, somehow had a reverberation across the globe.'⁴ There's a grandeur to the kind of realm in which Sequeira is playing. It is the realm of an abstraction that is at once both individually and communally experienced. His art is about something that is much bigger than him. These works are small and at the same time, they're massive because Sequeira is dealing with something which is of a universal order. For me, he is channeling something infinite of which he is a part and yet there is a finite quality to each arrangement of colour and geometry. I am not sure that many people will see the infinite/finite relationship that the *Songs* are demanding. Each work is a droplet, a very simple act of colour and geometry that can quickly become an ocean.

For me, engagement with the *Songs* is immediate. It's beyond intellect, mind and thought. It's beyond all the stuff that we think we know and understand. It just cuts right through all that business and goes somewhere else. It's almost as if it communicates with itself. When I enter that space, it can be very humbling and profound. Each *Song* is for 'being with' rather than looking at but you can only be with it when you are it. It's not something that is external to us. It's something that is internal. This is the act of contemplation. The *Songs* are not for everyone because in some ways it is a bit too difficult to deal with those things. It's a lot easier to get involved in intellectual or emotional exchange. These are way beyond those experiences.

Sequeira has a very intimate relationship with the idea of music and his *Songs* come from a place of complete joy. Music is pure vibration... density moving in and out and through us. It's in the universality of that vibration, in which joy is located. The thing about joy is, that you can only celebrate it. You can't think about it. You experience joy because you experience joy. It's this celebration that Sequeira seems to be inhabiting with these works.

Desmond Lazo is an artist and art historian who specialises in Traditional Indian Painting.

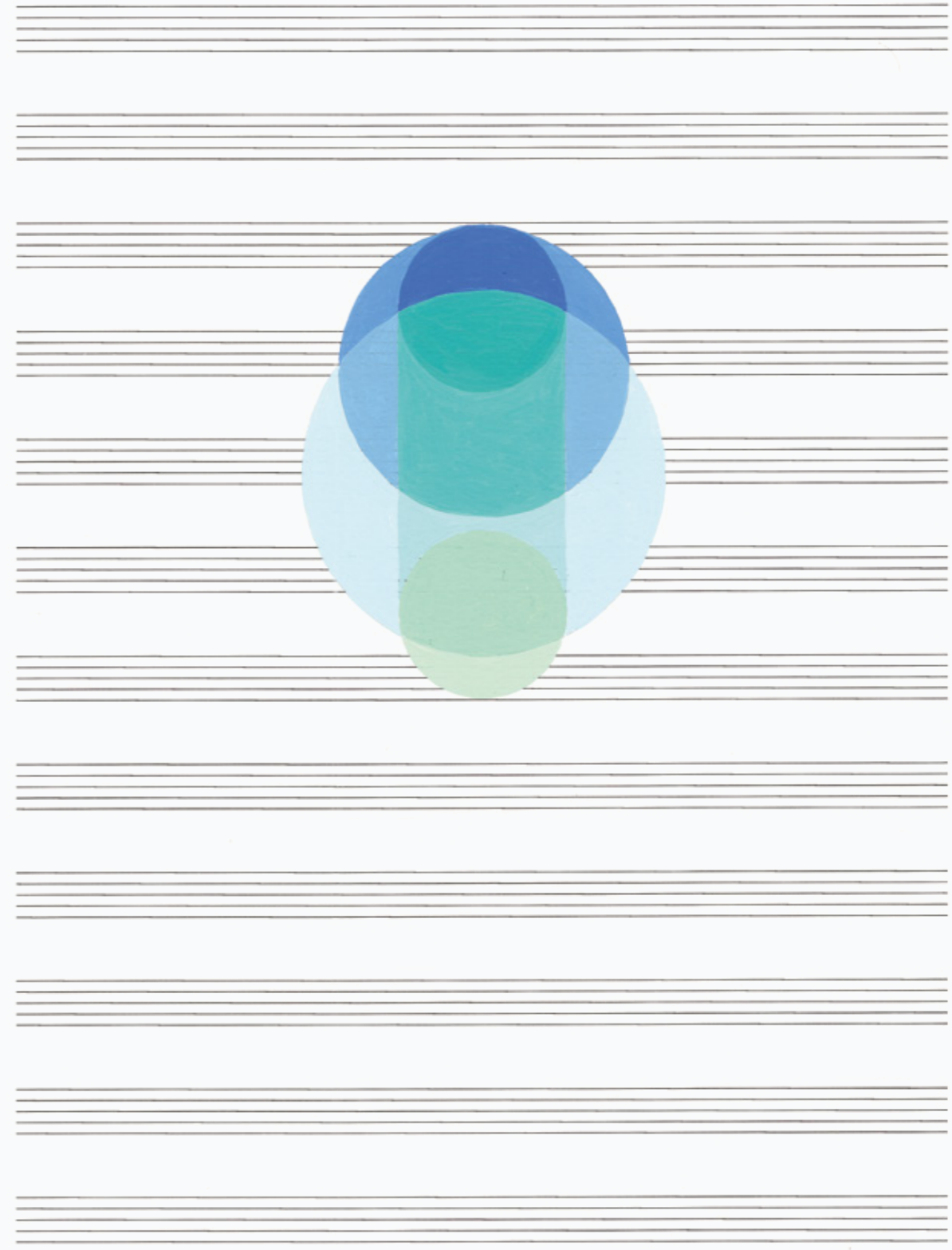




David Segneria

Song for Alienation

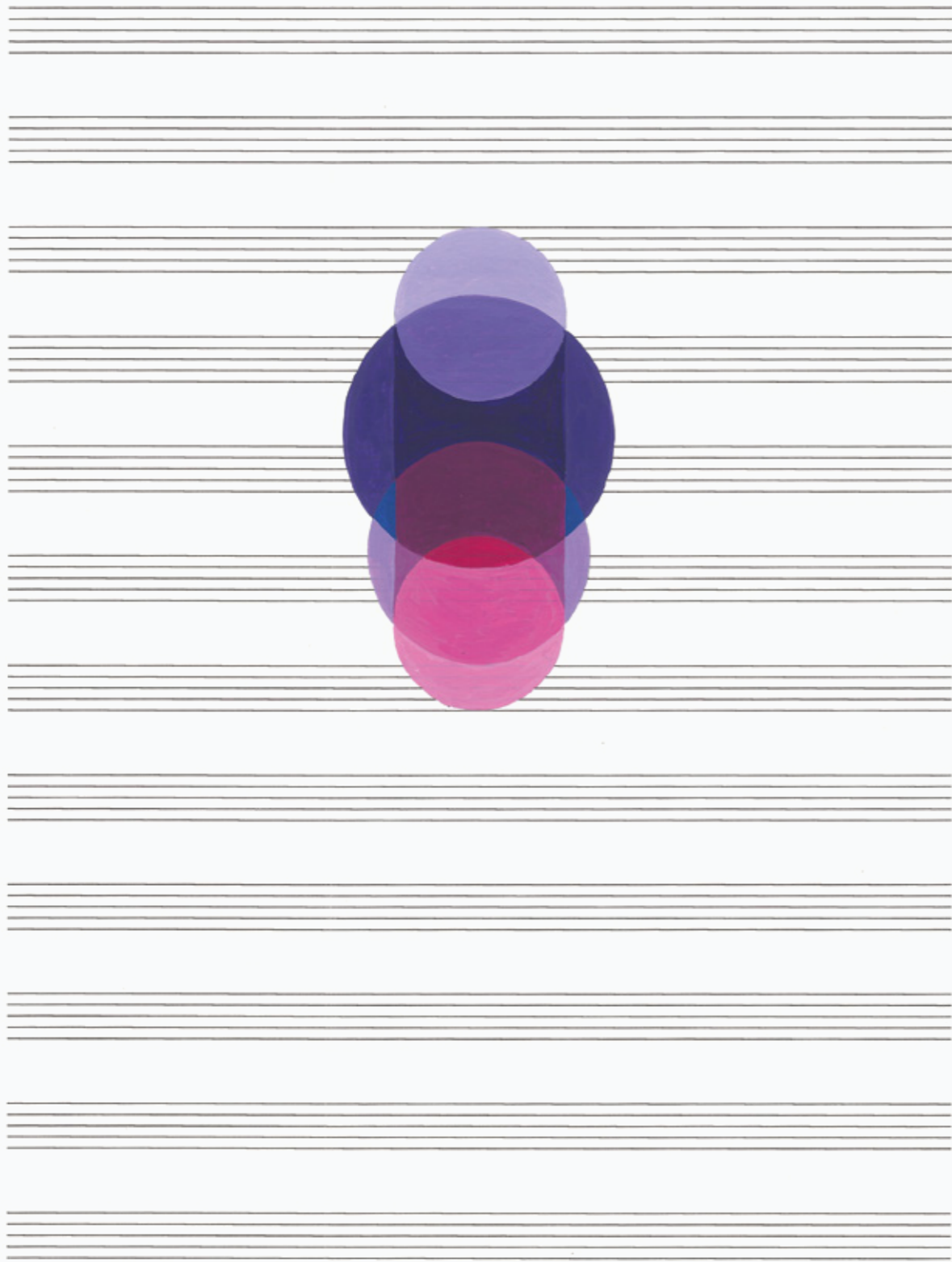
2021



David Segneria

Song for the Archangels

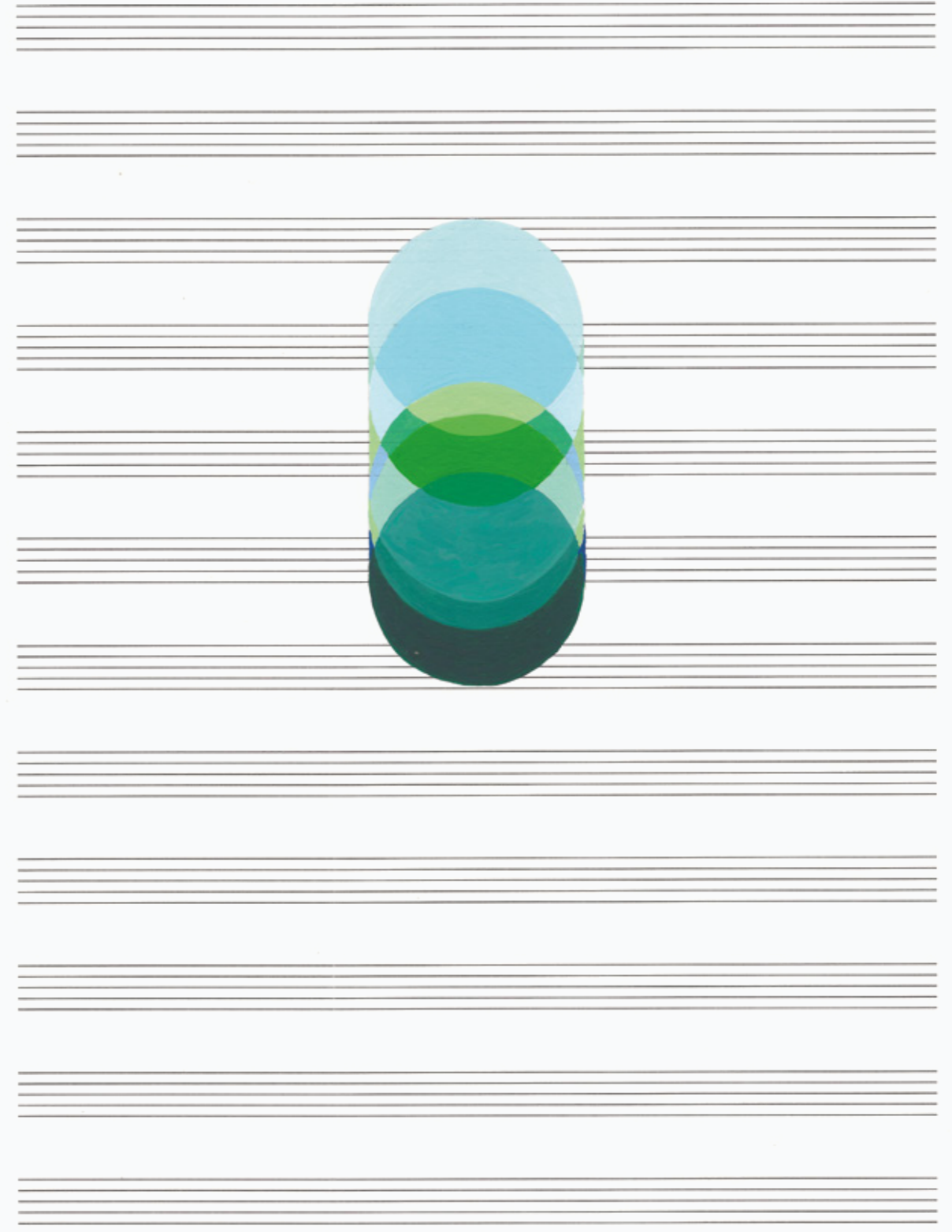
2020



David Seguela

Song for Collections

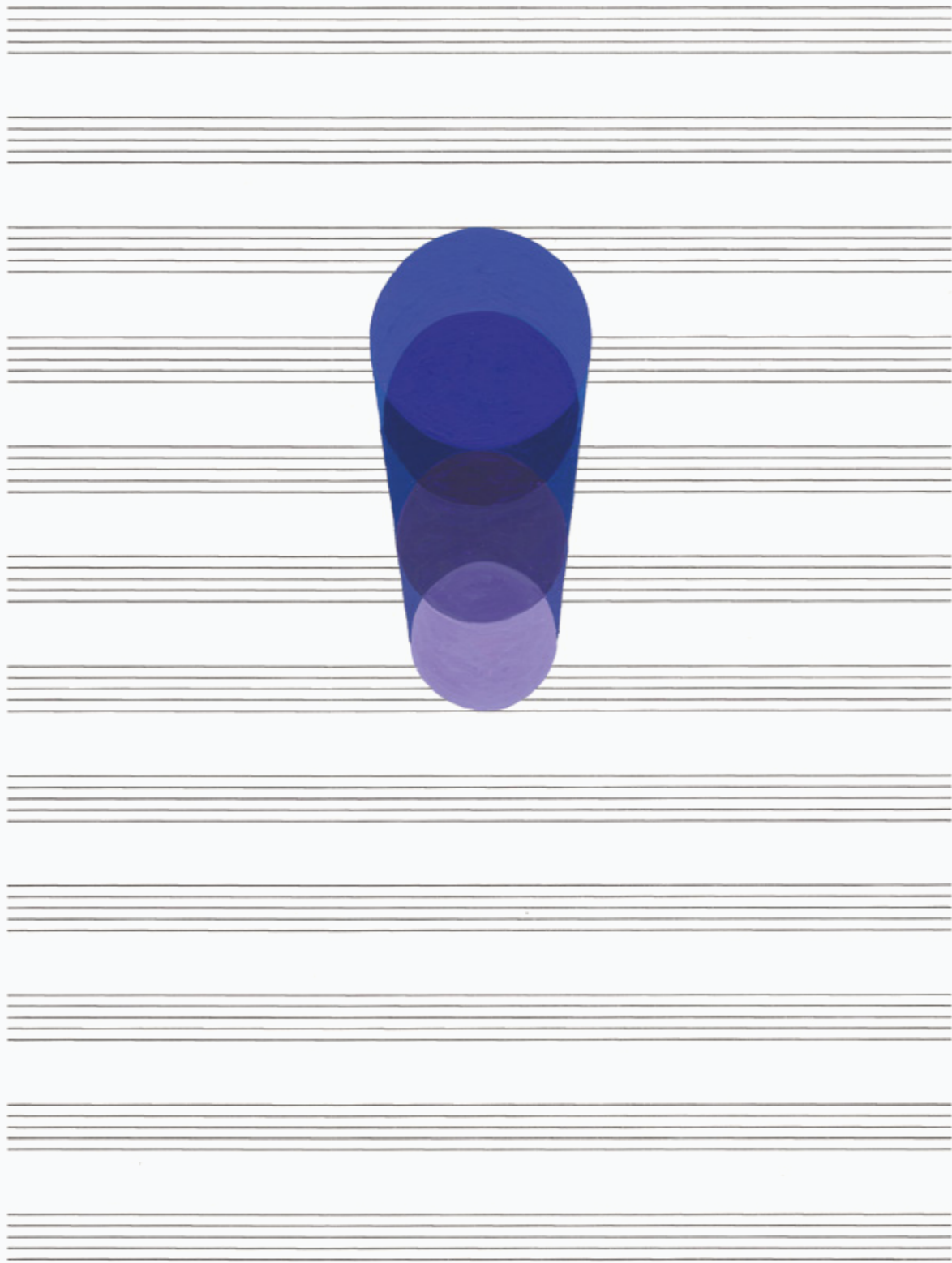
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David Seguela

Song for Expansion

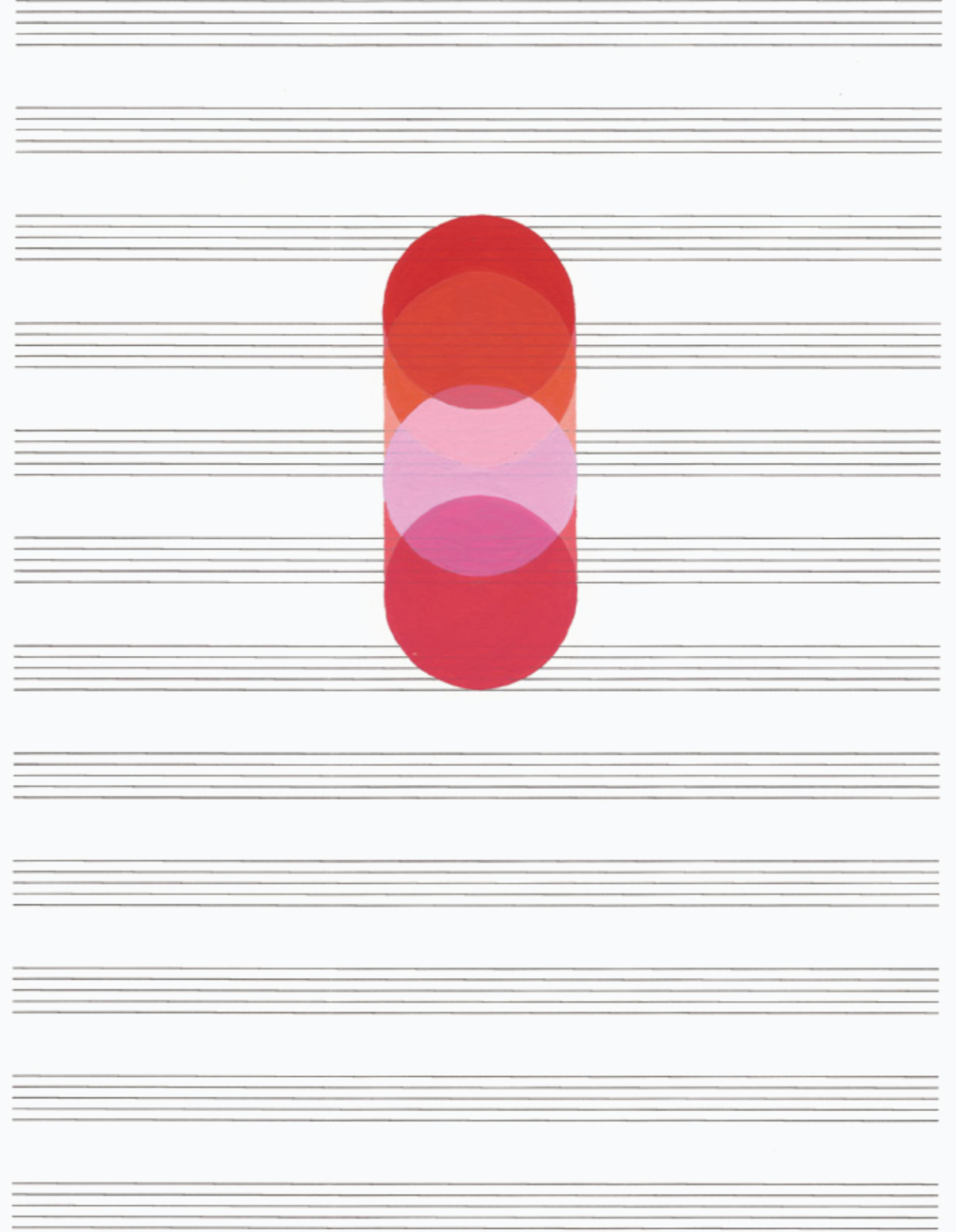
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David Segueira

Song for Intimacy

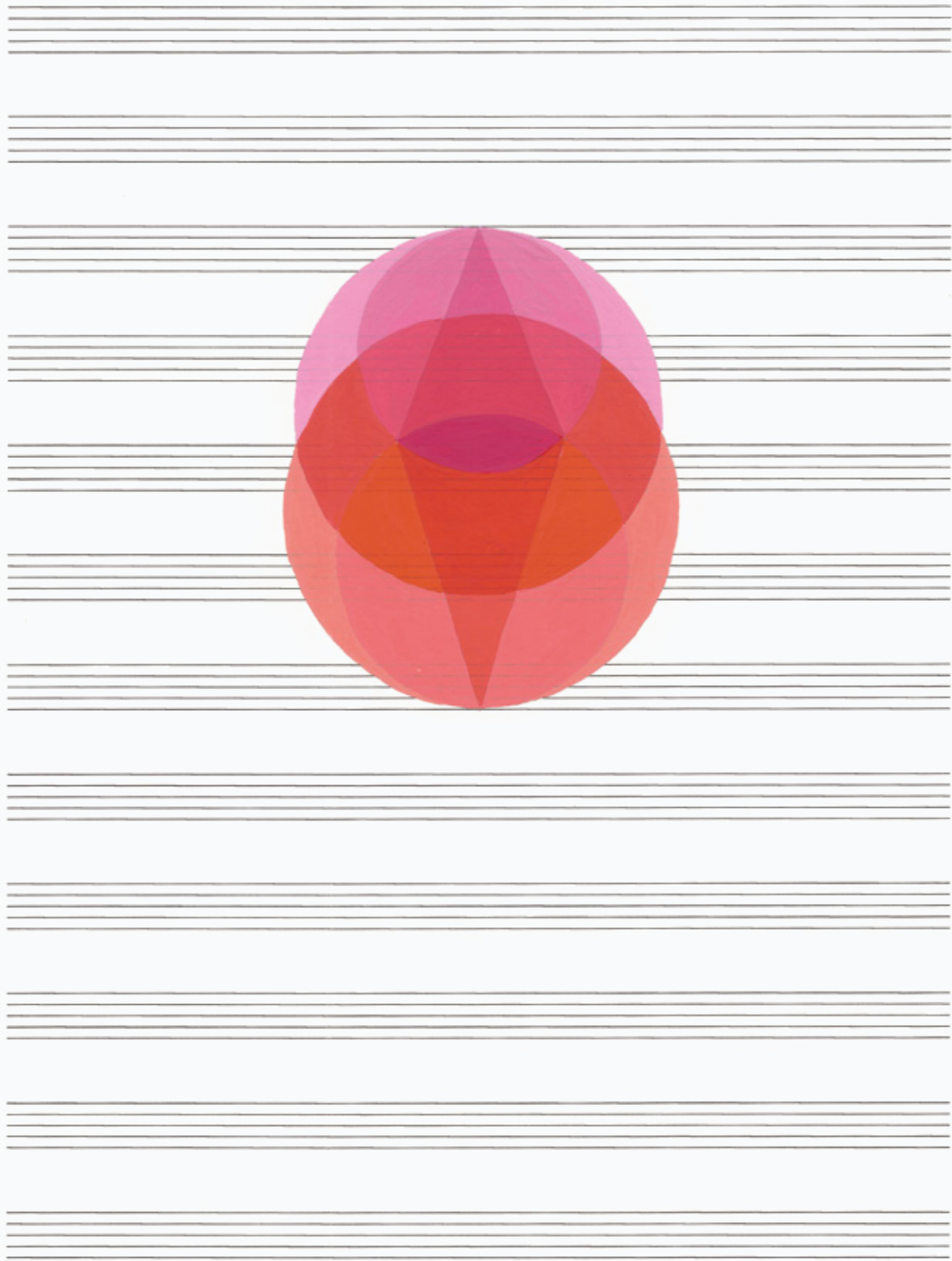
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David Segueira

Song for Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan

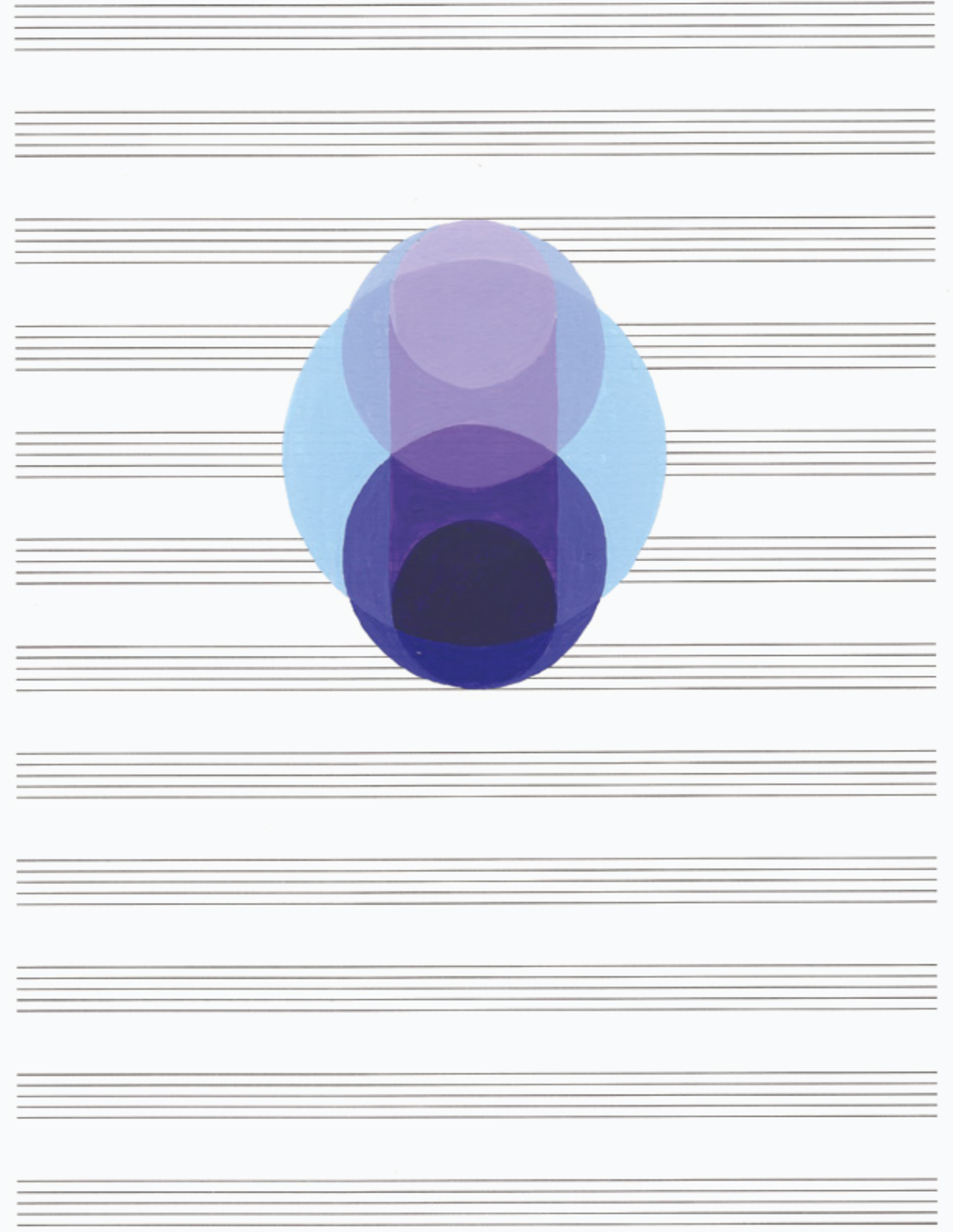
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David Segneria

Song for Prophets

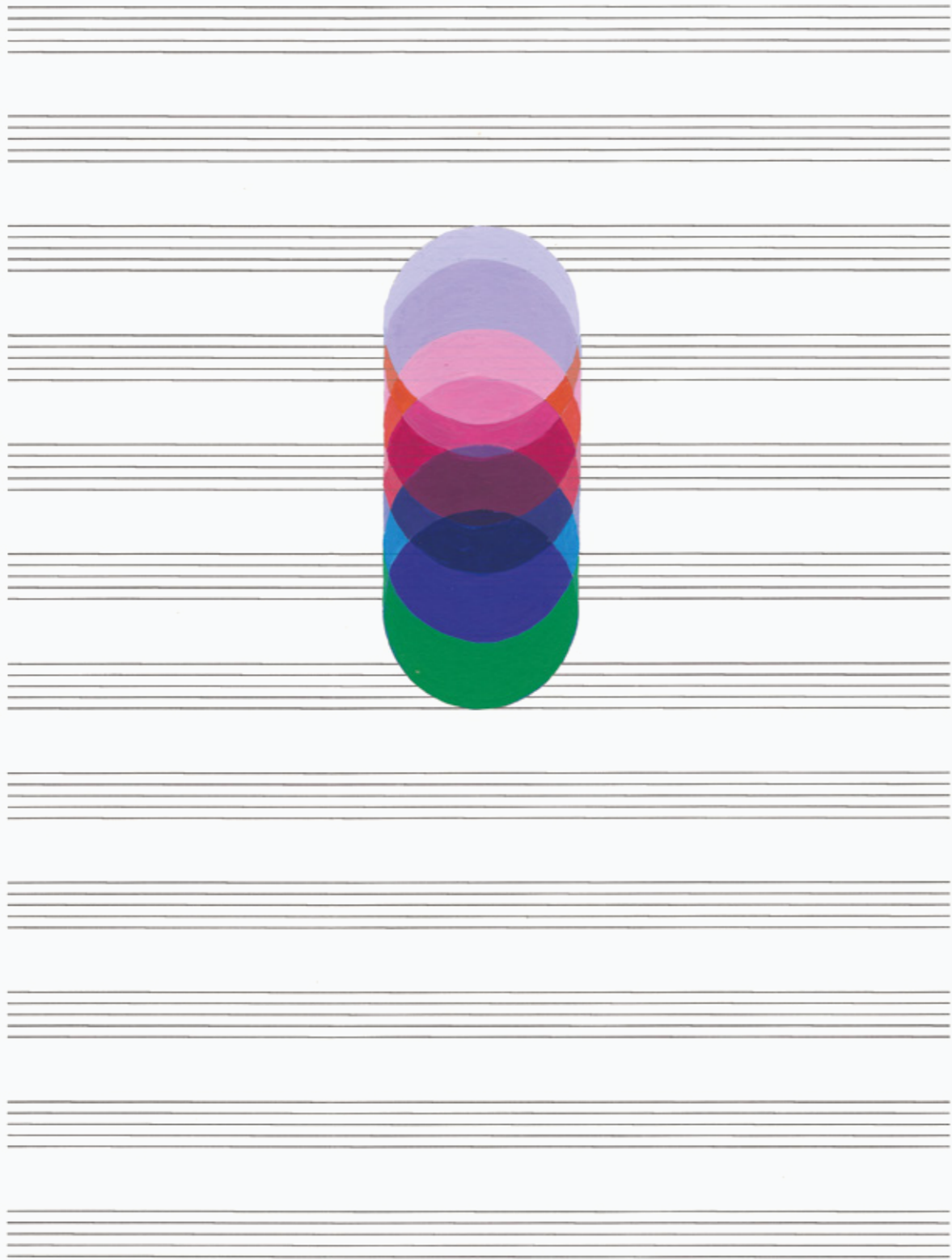
2020



David Segneria

Song for the Unspeakable

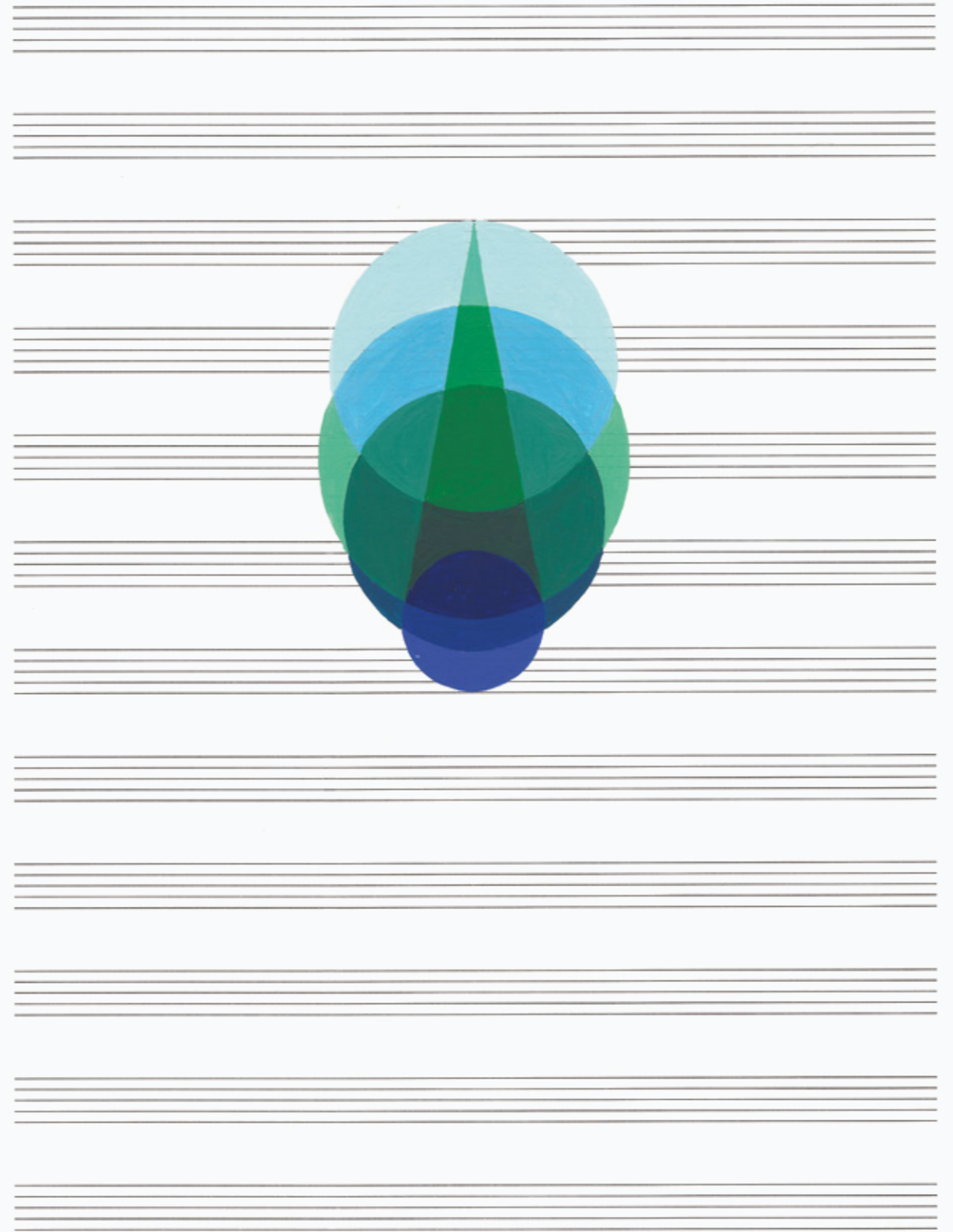
2020



David Sequena

Song for The Absent

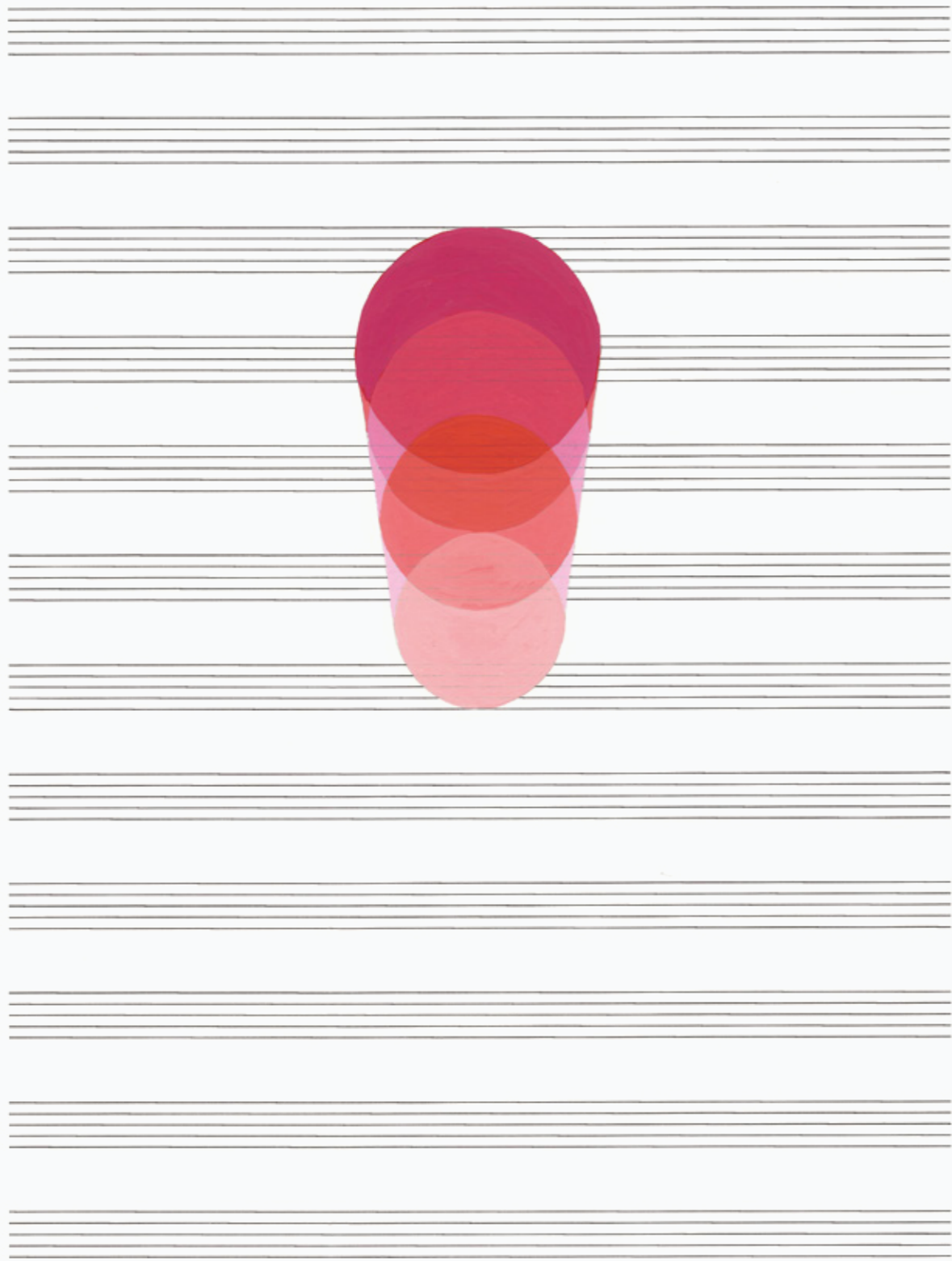
2021



David Sequena

Song for The Horizon

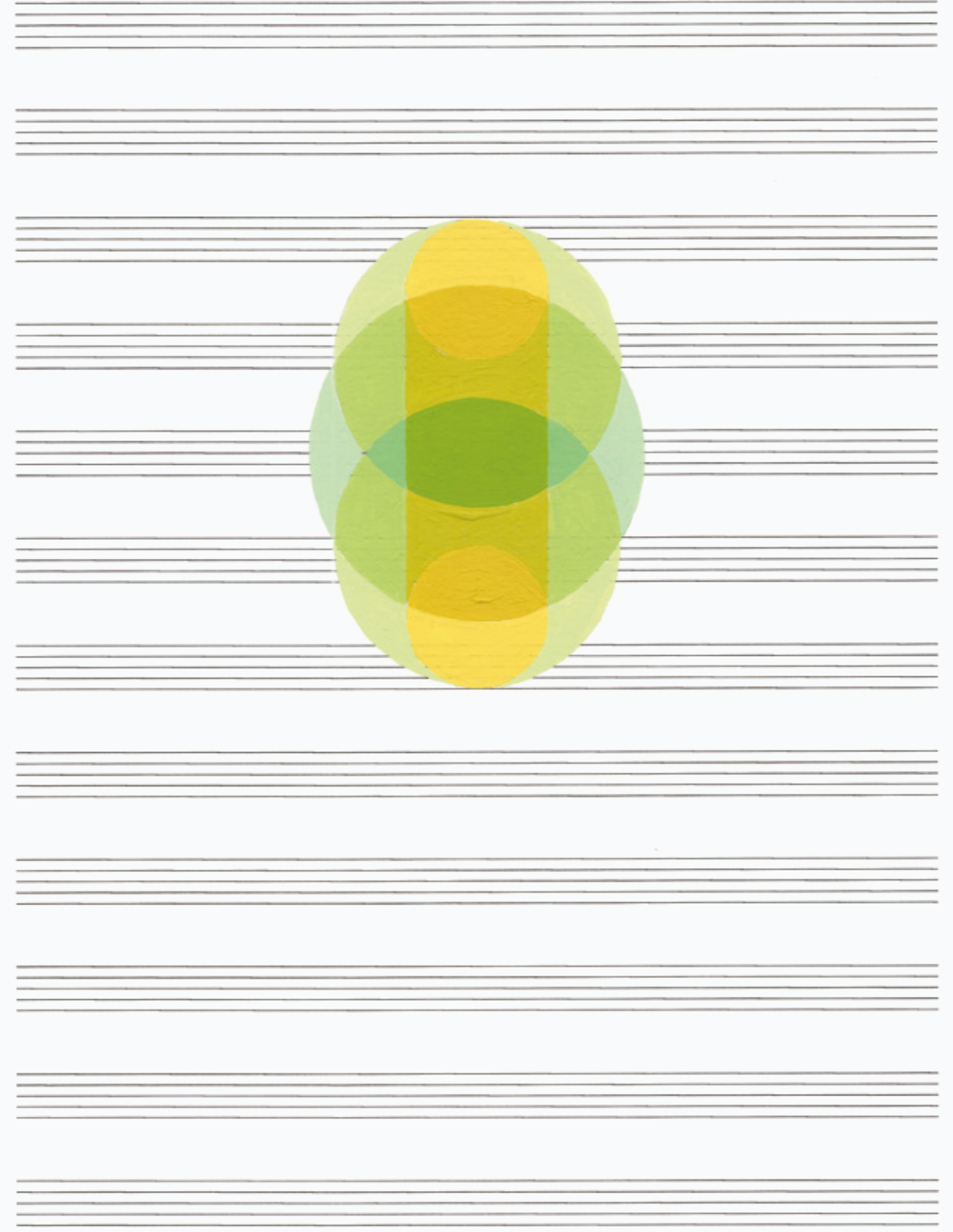
2020



David Segnera

Song for The Rejected

2020



David Segnera

Song for The Source

2020



History and Infinity by José Da Silva

1. 'Artempo: Where Time Becomes Art' (2007) was curated by Jean-Hubert Martin, Giandomenico Romanelli, Mattijs Visser and Daniela Ferretti, and brought together works from the Palazzo Fortuny's permanent collection with loans from the collection of Axel and May Vervoordt. Mattijs Visser and Jean-Hubert Martin would later bring this 'encyclopaedic' model of curating to 'Theatre of the World' (2012-13) at MONA. Earlier in 1989, Martin's exhibition 'Magiciens de la Terre' at the Centre Pompidou pronounced this approach as a cornerstone of contemporary curatorial practice.

2. Sequeira, 30 April 2022
<https://artsreview.com.au/david-sequeira-all-the-things-i-should-have-said-that-i-never-said/>

The transhistorical museum is not a new phenomenon. But perhaps 'Artempo: Where Time Becomes Art' (2007) is the exhibition that popularised the idea for contemporary audiences. Its presentation of visual and material culture sought to transfigure and connect diverse cultures, narratives, and times.¹ The approach became a defining characteristic of museum displays throughout the 2010s, with collection hangs leaping across historical and geographic contexts, creating new aesthetic and thematic associations. They sought to rupture display hierarchies and introduce marginalised and excluded visual histories and objects otherwise consigned to customary value. Importantly, they ask audiences to think about art history as groups of affinities rather than direct causalities.

This urge to intervene, disrupt or rethink the narratives of art has been a foundational strategy for David Sequeira over the past three decades. As an artist and curator, Sequeira has sought to generate a sense of personal time through exhibition-making, using curatorship as an expanded studio technique to allow him to rethink how we identify, value, and understand cultural production. We see the questions posed by this approach in the new work, *History and Infinity*, 2022, a shelf-based display of over 1000 glass and ceramic vessels punctuated by a selection of paintings by other artists, some of which are from Sequeira's personal collection.

Sourced from thrift stores around Australia – and considered 'discarded' rather than 'found' objects – Sequeira's vases are readymade expositions of the colours and shapes used to fashion decorative containers. They are everyday items that are made extraordinary in their massing. We see this in portraits of the artist at his Fiona and Sidney Myer Gallery office, flanked by floor to ceiling shelves that house the ever-expanding collection. While the vessels hint at functionality (some retain watermarks from prior use), others are lined with dust, implying a purely ornamental purpose. They are unified by their symmetry and opaque colouring, with Sequeira recognising: 'Individually, the vases are neither valuable nor even interesting. Collectively, I can arrange them into infinite orchestrations of colour and form.'²

Sequeira began using vases in his practice in the late 1990s, inspired by seeing vase motifs in decorative relief carvings at Mughal palaces throughout India. The image of this humble object was fascinating to Sequeira as a witness to events occurring within architectural spaces. In 2001, he presented the first collection of vases alongside a set of geometric paintings for *David Sequeira Projects* at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, using both as forms of abstraction to represent the seven colours of the rainbow and the seven Chakras or energy points of the body in meditation. The installation was formative for testing colour relations via the vase form, informing many permutations and experiments throughout his practice. In 2006, Sequeira presented a parade of 100 vases, *Collections 1 & 2* at the John Curtin Gallery, Perth as part of his ten-year survey exhibition. *Fugue*, 2008-2021, another of Sequeira's installations of coloured vessels was presented at Gertrude Glasshouse, Melbourne in 2019, and unlike previous vase-based works, jewel-coloured transparent vessels were

made especially for the project as part of Sequeira's residency at the Jam Factory Glass Studio, Adelaide. In each of these projects Sequeira creates 'chords' of colour and light in the gallery space through the careful arrangement of objects.

5. Ibid

Allusions to music appear throughout Sequeira's practice, with the understanding that several objects can operate like notes to form a musical chord. Sequeira describes the arrangement of vases in *History and Infinity* as 'chromatic harmonies', formed by shifting gradients of colour spanning the length of each gallery wall. While working with the constraint of symmetrical and opaque vases, Sequeira finds endless variations in their assembling – all sorts of rich and subtle differences in curves and colour. In the meditative process of installing the work, the placement of the paintings within infinite variations of tone and shape becomes an opportunity to locate works of art as moments within a bigger scheme associated with ideas of endlessness. The vases act as parentheses to the eight paintings that disrupt the sequence, echoing tones from their compositions on either side. Sequeira is explicit in his intentions for this staged relationship: 'I want to create physical and visual links between works of art that differ in style, philosophy, culture, and history. More specifically, I want to use everyday objects to interrupt a linear narrative about the history of art. I want to place the ordinary (vases) on the same level as the extraordinary (art). I use the shelf as a strategy for this levelling.'³

3. Sequeira in email to author, 9 March 2022

In *History and Infinity*, Sequeira envisions curatorship as the ability to make time malleable and suspend fixed readings of art: 'You generate your own time by placing objects together. Time can slip forward or backward depending on the selection and placement.'⁴ The installation presents itself as a horizontal line, although the subjects depicted move freely throughout history. The paintings refer to colonial history, modernism, postmodernism, paintings of paintings, creation stories, and references to 15th-century Flemish drapery and 18th-century French portraiture — a mash-up of ideas, places and approaches that form an unlikely connective tissue via Sequeira's colour chart of vessels. Bought through online auctions, purchased from galleries, or borrowed from friends, the paintings point to Sequeira's deeply personal understanding of art.

4. Sequeira in conversation with the author, 10 April 2022

The selection includes Gordon Bennett and Tim Johnson's *Creation Story I*, 1990, a work demonstrating art's ability to address the cosmos from different aesthetic and cultural positions. Megan Evans' *The colour of blood*, 1993, studies an incidental or overlooked fold of fabric from Rogier van der Weyden's *Durán Madonna*, 1435-38; while Greg Creek's reproduction of the mother figure in Hans Holbein the Younger's *Portrait of the Artist's Family*, c.1528, suggests learning through duplication, art as a copy of the past, or even a forgery. Another intriguing still life is an example of Australian tonalism by Rex Bramleigh from the 1930s. Here Sequeira acknowledges a moment of Australian modernism, once rejected, and now celebrated. This selection also features a mid-18th century portrait of a girl in attire typical of the French Court; a seascape by Charles Wheeler, c.1914, depicts London's Thames and Vauxhall Bridge; two colonial Australian landscapes c 1880-1910 and a contemporary miniature painting by Nusra Latif Qureshi.

Sequeira's selection represents an equal interest in what the paintings represent as historical entities and what they illustrate: 'Each speaks to a possibility. The possibility of imagination, representation — that nothing is just what you see.'⁵ We might also understand them as a rewiring of Australian art histories, or how art can refute being known, understood, or fixed in time more broadly. For Sequeira, these conceptual exercises are never about replacing histories outright. They acknowledge what might be parallel, adjacent, or forthcoming. In *History and Infinity*, Sequeira allows us to recognise multiplicities, creating a setting where cultural production is open to dialogue, collaboration, influence, and exchange.

José Da Silva is the Curator and Director of UNSW Galleries.



























Repetition, transgression and fashion in David Sequeira's *untitled, India* by Grace McQuilten

1. Deleuze, G. (1994). *Difference and repetition*. Columbia University Press.

In every respect, repetition is a transgression.
(Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 1968)¹

In a way, David Sequeira's *untitled, India*, 2022, is a love-letter to India that rips open complex histories and explores, with both sensitivity and sharp observation, a multifaceted country, continent and culture; while simultaneously unHINGING Australia's tendency to oversimplify Indian culture in both the good (Bollywood, cricket) and the bad (racism, cultural supremacy). In this work, Sequeira's observations and explorations are made through a series of 56 bespoke kurtas – long, loose-fitting shirts worn in many parts of South Asia, including India – which is underpinned by radical repetition. 36 kurtas feature intense colour blocking and the remaining 20 feature black and white photography associated with Indian history.

Each colour blocked garment is composed of three panels of coloured cotton fabric, often in variations of the same tone, which like Sequeira's works across other media including painting and ceramics, together create a melodic resonance of colour and form. Whilst the form is repeated throughout the series each kurta is different. Repetition and difference go hand in hand – as French Philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) argues, in nature there is no repetition without difference – that is, repetition is an integral part of change, and is inherently disruptive. In Sequeira's work, repetition is a powerful formal means of disrupting social and cultural norms. The use of the kurta in *untitled, India* represents a cultural repetition, the introduction and replication of a personal cultural motif. The kurta is a popular casual clothing item for Indian men, which is usually composed of a single panel of fabric, often in subdued tones. This repetition is radicalised through the use of bold, bright blocks of colour transposed to the fashion runway, perfectly in-step with global fashion trends while simultaneously transforming heteronormative assumptions of the norms (and arguably, limitations) of contemporary men's fashion: to put it simply, the kurta to a Western gaze, is a dress-like form – highly unusual in men's fashion.

There is also a repetition of pattern, colour and form that represents an expansion from Sequeira's painting practice into textile form that unsettles the Eurocentric tendency to separate visual art and material culture, fine art and craft. That is to say, an emphatic declaration that fashion is art; and that art is brought to life when embodied, entangled in human form and as an expression of tactile, textural material production. We see a repeating of, and highlighting of the contemporary importance of, decentred and decolonised cultural knowledges from across the globe, including India, where histories of art, craft and fashion have long been understood as integrated and integral forms of cultural expression.² These radical acts of visual and formal repetition are therefore both extraordinarily contemporary and yet also in tune with deeply lived cultural knowledge and experience – what we might resist reducing to the notion of the 'traditional'. They challenge and resist social norms, including cultural fashion norms and gender norms in fashion and pop culture, on the one hand, and the cultural norms of the contemporary art world, on the other. But perhaps most significantly, Sequeira's acts of repetition are deployed to challenge simplistic and reductive perceptions of Indian life and culture in the Australian popular imagination.

2. UNESCO 2013 cited in Collins, V. (2016). *Art and fashion*. *The Australasian Journal of Popular Culture*, 5(2-3), 165-185. https://doi.org/10.1386/ajpc.5.2-3.165_1

While formal observations of the play between colour, textile and form in *untitled, India*, start to reveal qualities of alterity and subversion, a more overt political critique is also at play in this series of textile artworks. This emerges visually in the 20 kurtas digitally printed with black and white photography on the front panel. These monochrome kurtas are interspersed throughout the series of 56, offering a visual break amid the otherwise explosions of colour, and forcing a conceptual break from the more celebratory and festive dimensions of the work. Each image depicts a cultural, political or social moment in Indian history, one that both centres historical knowledge while also complicating it, for example by pointing to the legacies of British colonisation; revealing contemporary gay, lesbian and trans cultures, and highlighting democratic protests.

Sequeira's selection spans from the historic to the contemporary. One key image features a portrait of Lord and Lady Curzon, the Viceroy and Vicereine of India from 1899-1905, the human instruments of England's colonial rule. The image features the couple outdoors in the city of Hyderabad, capital of the state of Telangana. Most strikingly, at their feet lies the body of a dead tiger, killed in a hunting expedition. The image speaks to the cruelty and ignorance of colonisation: tigers in India have since become endangered due to habitat loss and poaching. It therefore has a quality of premonition – alluding to future ecological disaster and the ongoing impacts of human violence. Another kurta features an image of a cremation fire, with a human figure adorned in full PPE (personal protection equipment) – the familiar garb of our twenty-first century pandemic era. This is an iconic image of COVID-19 as it impacted on many places in India, in this case Srinagar, Kashmir in May of 2021. The kurta displays a public burning; a sign of the devastation of the disease, where medical services were unable to keep up with the sheer volume of bodies falling to the virus.

By transforming these images into garment form, Sequeira also complicates the ethnographic gaze inherent to Western readings of documentary photography: these are not images of India/Indian people to be consumed. Instead, the images – all of which feature people – are literally embodied. The garment, even when not worn on the body, alludes to and speaks to the body. When worn, each image/person/body comes to life. In this way, the images/people in the photographs also come into relation with the wearer (and potential wearer). These aspects of relationality and embodiment come to the fore most powerfully in the runway performance that features in this exhibition. Set to music performed by Veena virtuoso and composer Hari Sivanesan, the runway gives movement and life to the kurtas with 56 male models of Indian descent on the catwalk. Again, celebration and festivity come into sharp dialogue with history – in this case, a confronting performance of complex Indian identity and culture- defiant, heartfelt and celebratory, that resists simple dynamics of consumption/pleasure.

The use of fashion to enact political and social critique in *untitled, India* draws on histories of performance art and also confronts an enduring anti-fashion bias in contemporary art that speaks to the limitations of eurocentrism. In contemporary art discourses and markets, hierarchies of value stubbornly persist (art over craft, visual over haptic, fine over applied) that reinforce the status quo; namely, consumers, audiences, patrons and cultural gatekeepers overwhelmingly of upper middle-class, Anglo-centric backgrounds. This investment in the idea of art as distinct from material culture also emphasises the superior monetary value

3 Noveck, J. (2016, May 08).
*Met curator Andrew Bolton quietly
defends fashion as art.*
Chicago Tribune.

of art objects that infer social and cultural capital over, for example, the more consumable and reproducible objects and experiences of daily life. This bias is well known and was well articulated, for example by Andrew Bolton, Head Curator of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute, New York: "I think they see fashion as something that is deeply rooted in the commercial world, not in the art world," Bolton says. "And the popularity of fashion can also be annoying to some people; they don't like that it brings in such huge numbers. But the reason why it does is that it's a living art form we can all relate to"³

Sequeira's *untitled, India* is also a radical performance with a rebellious spirit, but it does not involve the cutting away of the art object or a rejection of fashion. Instead, it asserts the beauty and value of its central motif, the kurta. This assertion is repeated over and over, with slight but significant variations in bold colour blocks, and even more significant variations in the black and white images that segment, break and add a powerful and political counter-rhythm to the work's overall melody. Through the repetition of these cultural tropes, the kurta, the documentary photograph, and the fashion runway, Sequeira expands, enhances and excavates a more complex reading, one that makes us go back and look again.

Dr Grace McQuilten is an art historian, artist and curator interested in contemporary art and design and community development.



















Catalogue of Works

All works courtesy of the artist unless otherwise stated
Dimensions of works are given in centimetres (cm),
height followed by width

David Sequeira

Born India 1966. Arrived Australia 1970.
Lives and works in Melbourne.

Song Cycle 2019 - 2022

26 paintings: gouache on music manuscript paper,
13 music stands
each painting: 29.7 × 21.0 cm, installation variable

History and Infinity 2022

installation: glass and ceramic vases, paintings by
various artists, shelf
50-meter shelf; installation and dimensions variable

Paintings as installed, left to right:

Nusra Latif Qureshi

Born Pakistan 1973. Arrived Australia 2001.
Lives and works in Melbourne.

A very subtle painting in green 2022

mixed media on hardboard
diptych: 30 × 60 cm overall measurements
Courtesy of the artist
Reproduced pp.36, 38-39. Photo: Christian Capurro

Megan Evans

Born Australia. Lives and works in Melbourne.

The colour of blood 1993

oil on canvas on wood
37.0 × 24.0 cm
Collection of David Sequeira
Reproduced p.41. Photo: Christian Capurro

Artist unknown

Not titled c1750 France
oil on canvas
50.0 × 40.0 cm
Private collection, Melbourne
Reproduced p.50. Photo: Christian Capurro

Artist unknown

Not titled [landscape with hills, stream and figure
with horse and cart on bridge] c1900
oil on cardboard
45.0 × 59.0 cm
Collection of David Sequeira

Gordon Bennett (left panel)

Australia 1955 – 2014.

Tim Johnson (right panel)

Born Australia 1947. Lives and works in Sydney.

Creation Story I 1990

acrylic on canvas
diptych: 45.5 × 30.0 cm each panel
©The Estate of Gordon Bennett.
Tim Johnson © Courtesy of the artist and Tolarno
Galleries. Reproduced p.48. Photo: Christian Capurro

Charles Wheeler

Born New Zealand 1880. Arrived Australia 1892.
Died 1977.

(Barges on the Thames, with Vauxhall Bridge in the distance) c 1914

oil on canvas
45.0 × 60.0 cm
© The Estate of Charles Wheeler. Courtesy of
Charles Nodrum Gallery, Melbourne. Reproduced
pp.42 & 44. Photo: Christian Capurro

Greg Creek

Born Australia 1959. Lives and works in Melbourne.

Detail study from Hans Holbein 'The artist's family, c1528 1992

oil on canvas
39.5 × 29.5 cm
Courtesy of the artist
Reproduced pp.32,34-35. Photo: Christian Capurro

Artist unknown

Not titled [landscape with mountains,
lake and sailing boat] c1890 Australia
oil on board
16.0 × 21.0 cm
Collection of David Sequeira
Reproduced p.53. Photo: Christian Capurro

Rex Bramleigh

Australia 1923 - 2014.

Not titled c1940

50.5 × 61.0 cm
oil on Masonite
Private collection
Reproduced p.53. Photo: Christian Capurro

untitled, India 2022

56 kurtas: 36 coloured cotton fabric; 20 digitally printed cotton fabric
installation and dimensions variable

untitled, India (details)



National Security Guard commando at Taj Mahal Palace Hotel after terrorist attacks in Mumbai, Maharashtra, India, November 2008.



Lord Kurzon (Viceroy of India) and his wife Lady Kurzon in Hyderabad posing with hunted Bengal tiger, 1905.



Acid attack survivor, India. 2019.



Kashmir students protesting the rape and murder of an eight-year-old Muslim girl in Srinagar, April 2018.



David Sequeira's parents Alex and Rose Sequeira, Delhi, India c1960.



Famine genocide in India Madras (1876 -1879) under British colonial rule.



Overcrowded train transferring refugees during the Partition of India, 1947.



The 12th Delhi Queer Pride Parade, 24 November 2019.



Muslim women protesting the Central Government over the Farm bill, Hathras rape incident and other issues in Kolkata, India. 1 October, 2020.



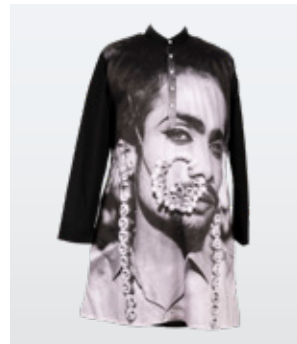
Two of the King of Delhi's sons hanged for taking part in the murder of the English resident in Delhi at the commencement of the Indian mutiny in 1857.



Forensic evidence at Hamida Hospital, Bhopal, India of foetal deaths caused by the Bhopal gas tragedy in 1984.



Refugee camp in Delhi during the Partition of India in 1947.



Mumbai Pride Parade at the Azad Maidan, 1 February 2020.



A family member after the death of a COVID-19 victim in an oxygen relief centre in Ajmer, Rajasthan, 6 May 2021.



Famine genocide in India Madras (1876 -1879) under British colonial rule.



Women sorting recyclable materials in Dhapa Garbage Dump, Kolkata, West Bengal, India, 14 February 2017.



The Beatles in India in 1968. From left Jane Asher, Paul McCartney, Maharishi Yoga and George Harrison.



David Sequeira age 3, Delhi, India, 1969.



Protesting Kashmir students clash with Indian government forces in central Srinagar's Lal Chowk on 17 April, 2017.



COVID-19 victim being cremated at a public cremation ground in Srinagar, Kashmir, 2021.

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Authors

Georgia Cribb
José Da Silva
Desmond Lazaro
Grace McQuilten
David Sequeira
Penny Teale

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Bunjil Place Gallery Director

Georgia Cribb

Bunjil Place Gallery Curator

Penny Teale

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