



DONIBANE GARAZI

PAINTINGS OF SAINT JEAN PIED DE PORT

BY JOSETTE DACOSTA

JOSETTE DACOSTA (Bordeaux, 1944)

Born in Bordeaux in southwest France, Josette Dacosta spent her childhood in the Basque Country, in the foothills of the Pyrenees close to the frontier between France and Spain. After living in Italy and Belgium, she studied painting in Madrid during the 1980s in the studio of abstract painter Teresa Muñiz.

In 1991, she moved to Oxford, where she had her first solo exhibition. She now divides her time between Oxford and the Basque Country, where her main studio is in Saint Jean Pied de Port.

josette.dacosta@wanadoo.fr



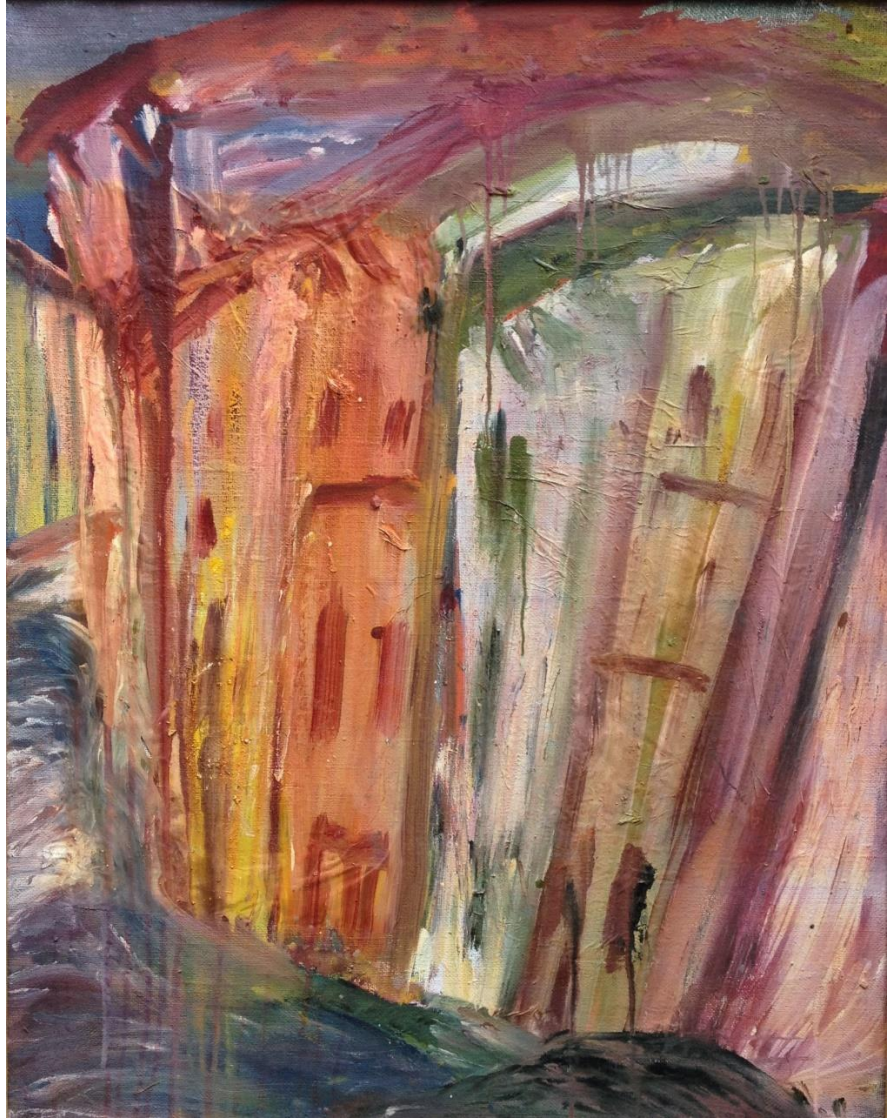
Solo exhibitions

- 2015:** Civivox Iturrama, Pamplona
Sala Oxford, Zumaia
- 2014:** Aroztegi Aretoa, Bergara
- 2013:** Café Sabina, Centro Comercial Itaroa, Huarte
Lobiano Cultural Centre, Ermua
Ttirritta, Ustaritz
- 2009:** Kalostrape, Bayonne
- 2005:** Château de Ruthie, Aussurucq
- 2002:** Eskual Etxea, Paris
- 2001:** CREPS, Chatenay Malabry
- 1999:** Villa Ducontentia, Saint Jean de Luz
- 1998:** Maison Française, Oxford
- 1996:** Centro cultural Haize Berri, Ostabat
- 1994:** CREPS, Chatenay Malabry
- 1993:** Rewley House, Oxford
- 1992:** Maison Française, Oxford

Selected collective exhibitions

- 2017:** "L'Art au Féminin", Saint Jean Pied de Port
- 2015:** Castillo de Pedraza, with sculptor Iñaki Olazabal
and graphic artist Verónica Domingo Alonso
- 2014:** "Lanzarote vs. Lanzarote", BilbaoArte,
with Verónica Domingo Alonso
- 2013:** "Remp'ARTS", Bayonne
"Emakumeen artea", Bastero Cultural Centre, Andoain
- 2012:** "Bi ikuspegi", Saint Jean Pied de Port,
with photographer Abel Bourgeois
Galerie Le Cheval de Sable, Paris
- 2011:** "L'Art de la Table", Chapelle des Recollets, Ciboure
"RegardS", Musée de Guéthary
- 2010:** Escuela de Música del Valle de Egüés, Olaz (Navarra),
with portrait artist Zoe Bray
"Iparraldetik Hegoaldera", Elizondo
- 2009:** Errobiko Festibala, Itxassou, with Zoe Bray
- 2008:** "L'Art du collage", Saint Jean Pied de Port
- 2007:** "Le Printemps au Cloître", Urdax
- 2006:** AralArte, Lekunberri
- 2005:** Maison des Pyrénées Atlantiques, Paris, with sculptor Juan Gorriti

Donibane Garazi,
Oil on canvas,
100 x 81 cm, 2007



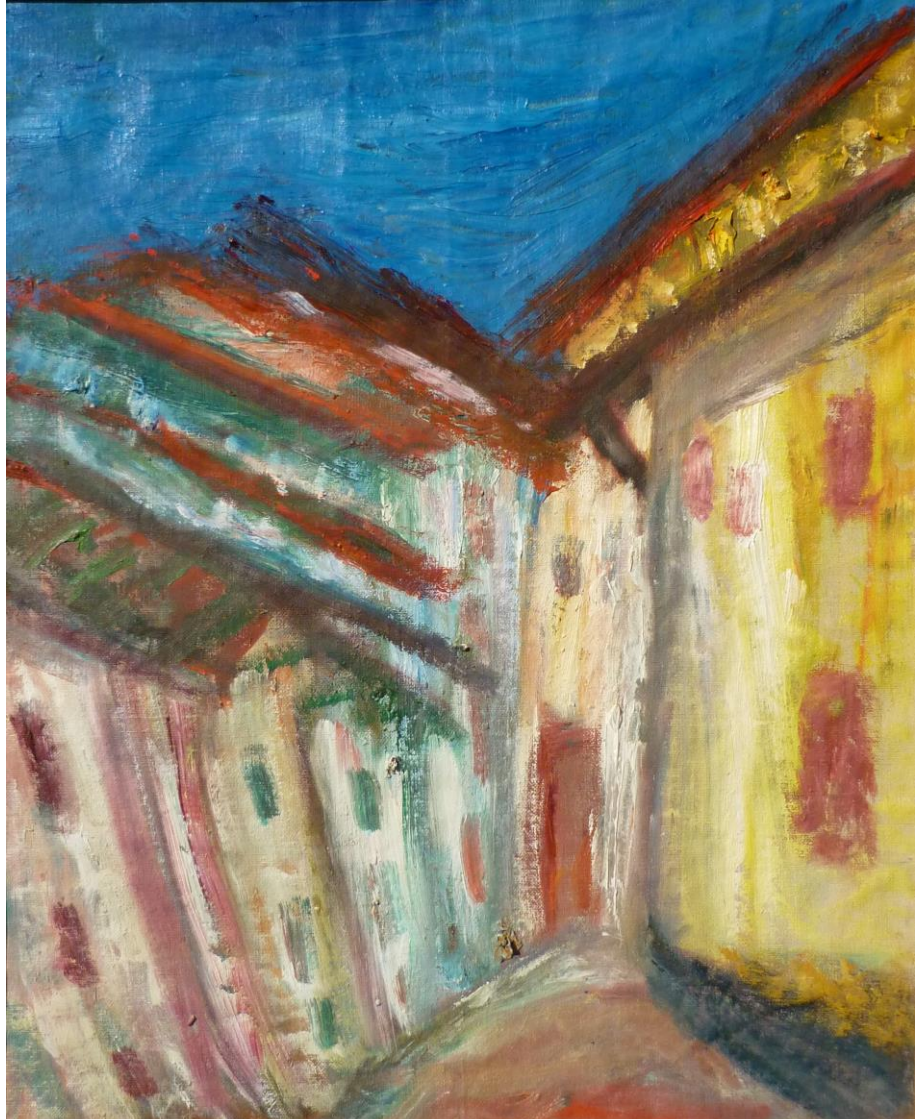


Saint Jean Pied de Port, or Donibane Garazi in Basque, is the capital of the Basque province of Lower Navarre.

A fortified town with a population of 1,500, it dominates access to the pass leading southwards over the Pyrenees into the former kingdom of Navarre, of which Lower Navarre was once part.

It is a key staging post for pilgrims making their way to Santiago de Compostela, in north-western Spain, to pay homage at the tomb of St James.

Donibane Garazi,
Oil on canvas,
60 x 49 cm, 2008





Josette Dacosta at the Maison Française, Oxford

Josette Dacosta is a remarkable artist, constantly experimenting with and developing new techniques to express her vision. She is a restless artist who prefers not to settle in any one style but to press on and find new ways and form of expression. The result is extraordinary, for her canvases burst with life and colour. At present she is following an increasingly abstract path, but it has evolved naturally over the years from early still-lives and portraits to landscapes and street scenes where buildings seem to come to life, to speak. Her series of canvases depicting the principal street – the Rue de la Citadelle – of the Basque town of Saint Jean Pied de Port, where she has her studio and gallery, is the focus of this exhibition – her third at Oxford’s Maison Française.

The Rue de la Citadelle is a narrow, steep curving street that descends from the citadel at the top of the town to the church at the bottom. During two winters, when the light has a special clarity and tourists and pilgrims (it is on the route of St James, Santiago de Compostela) are absent, Josette would go out early in the morning with her canvases and oils and paint the length and breadth of the street from three vantage points: a medieval stone platform at the top looking down, a balcony above a restaurant in the middle, and from the church tower at the bottom looking up.

The result is a set of almost vertiginous canvases, where the viewer seems to tumble down the street hemmed in by the narrow houses hugging each other along the hill, arrested only by brilliant colour and the three-dimensionality of the buildings. “It is a view up and down the hill following the curve,” Josette explains. “I found it difficult to put all the buildings together. They are tightly locked together.”

Josette's use of colour is bold, "to attract the eyes," she says. She uses mostly primary colours: blue, yellow, white, red, ochre. "The sun changes colours; the earth is red." Her dark red is reminiscent of the traditional colouring of Basque house shutters, where ox-blood was mixed with plaster to give a distinctive colour. Then there is the dark pink stone from the local quarries. The blue of her sky is so strident that one seems to feel the heat it promises. Her yellow is so citric it stops the eye abruptly – and most pleurably.

Though she learned to draw at the outset of her artistic career, she prefers to paint directly with colour, drawing the outline with the brush. Then, in her words, "building up the paint, putting down the dark and light – the shadows and the sun falling on the house. You can make the building breathe." She adds: "The secret is the sun, the light, the shadow. It starts with the shadow and then the light." And then "the light and shadow on the buildings give them form and depth."

Interestingly, Josette says she was much influenced by an exhibition she saw some time ago of townscapes by the Austrian expressionist artist Egon Schiele (1890-1918), better known for his often highly erotic drawings of nudes. Also influential were paintings by another expressionist, the Russian-born Chaim Soutine (1893-1943), of the southern French town of Céret.

Another feature of her art is her love of an often thick, tangible impasto: "I like to touch the material – it's very physical." This has led her lately to move away from oil and brushes and turn to pigment mixed with linseed oil and stabiliser, and to use her hands and rags. She works on the floor, setting the easel aside. Again, colour and texture dominate in works vibrant with expression.

With Josette's art there is never a dull moment, and these paintings of the Rue de la Citadelle, shown in Oxford for the first time outside St Jean Pied de Port, mark a distinctive and vital stage in her development. Above all, they are giddy with colour and movement and they breathe *joie de vivre*.

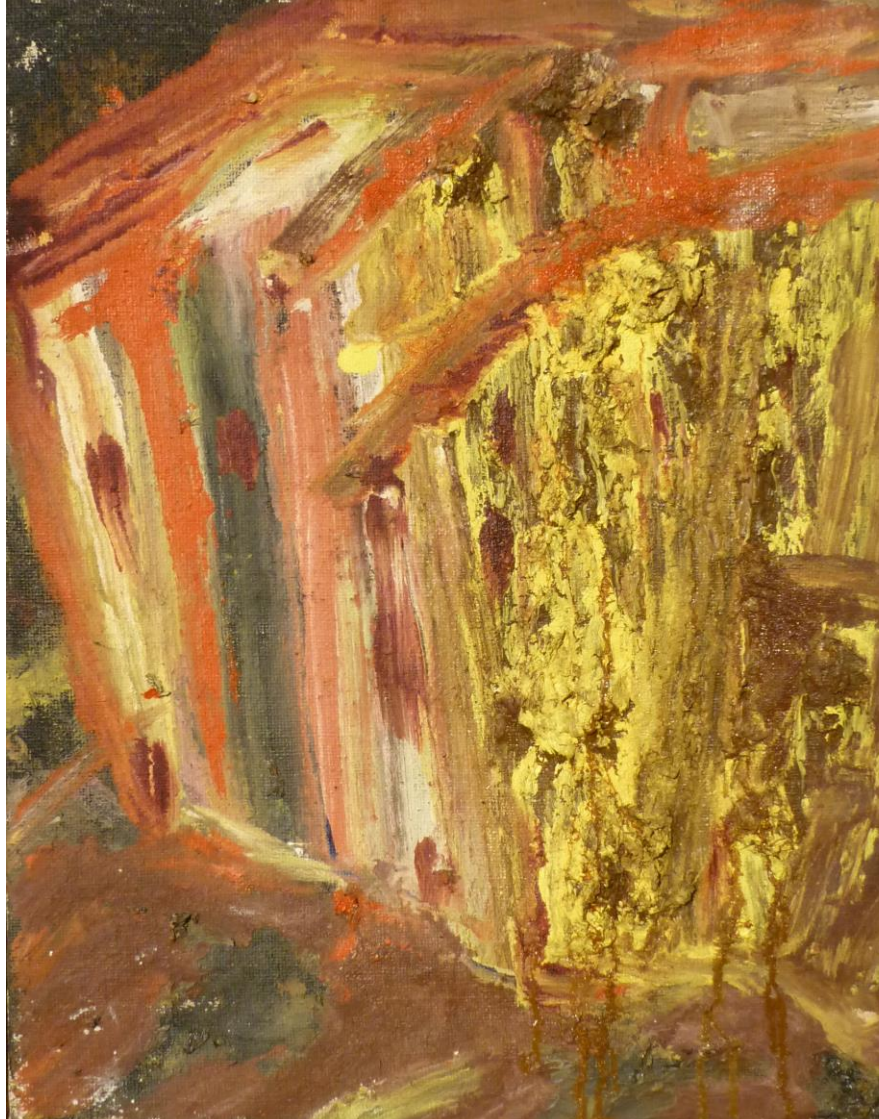
Michael Farr





Donibane Garazi,
Oil on canvas,
100 x 81 cm, 2008

Donibane Garazi,
Oil on canvas,
61 x 50 cm, 2009

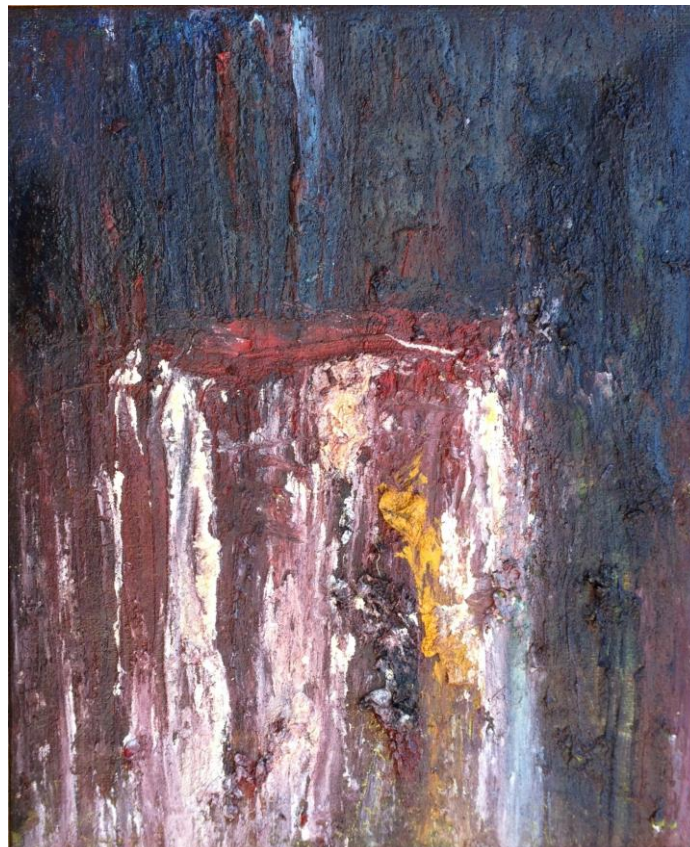




Donibane Garazi, Oil on canvas, 78 x 106 cm, 2009



Untitled,
Oil on canvas,
54 x 46 cm, 2009



Untitled,
Oil on canvas,
54 x 46 cm, 2009



Donibane Garazi,
Oil on canvas,
60 x 30 cm, 2003

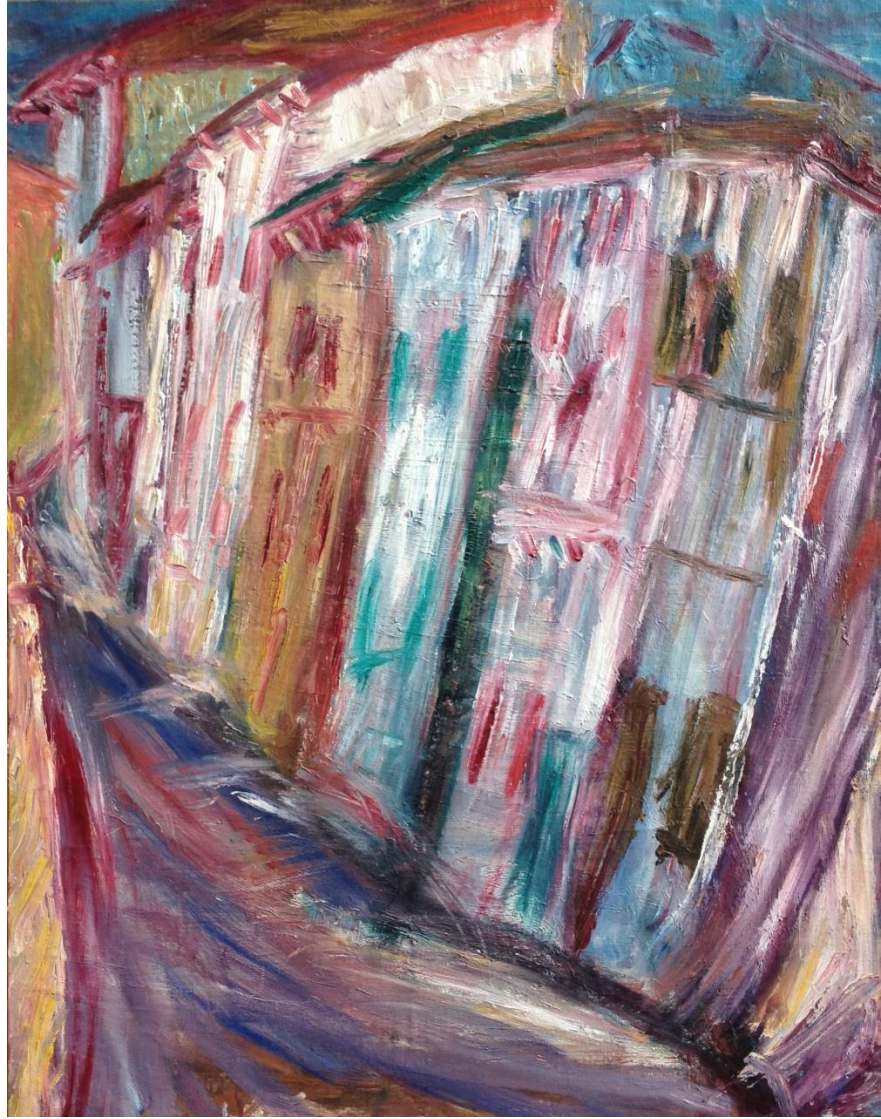


Donibane Garazi, oil on canvas, 89 x 108 cm, 2008



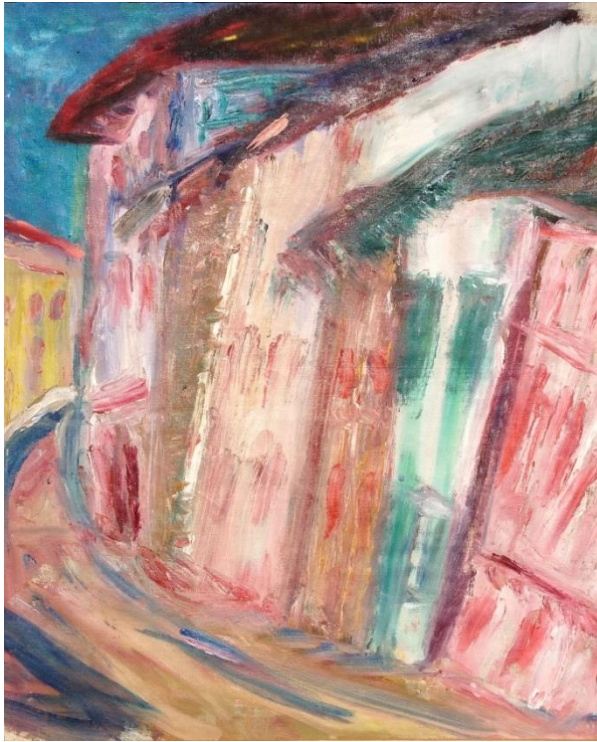
Donibane Garazi, Oil on canvas, 65 x 73 cm, 2006

Donibane Garazi,
Oil on canvas,
116 x 89 cm, 2007

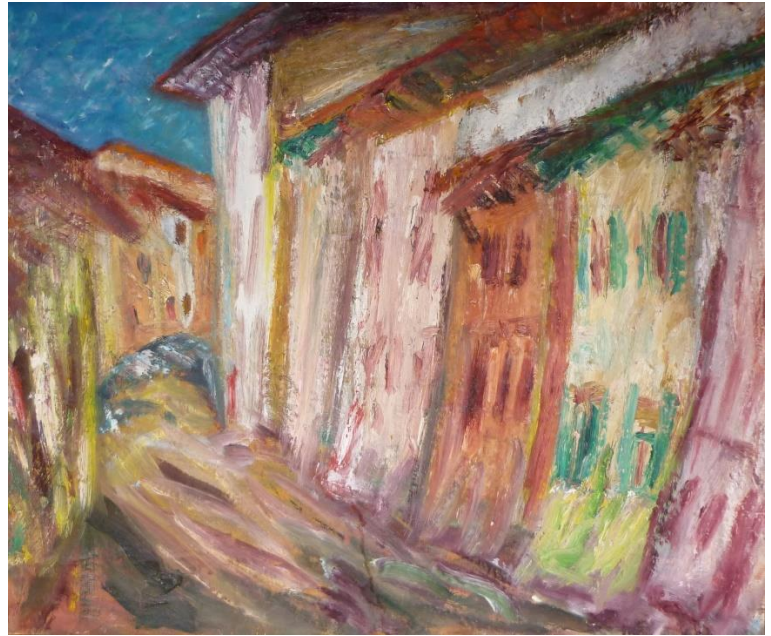




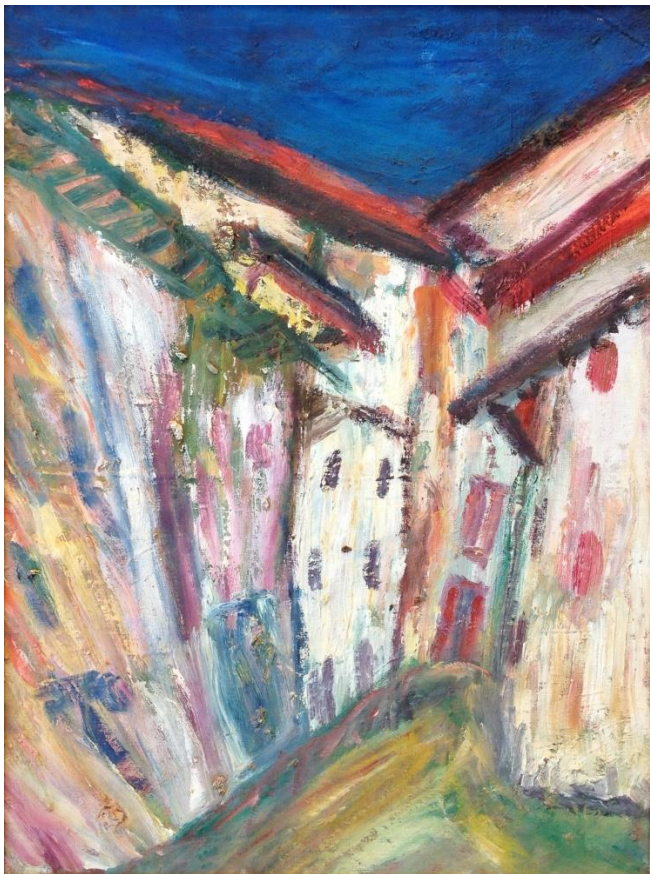
Donibane Garazi,
Oil on board,
65 X 53 cm, 2006



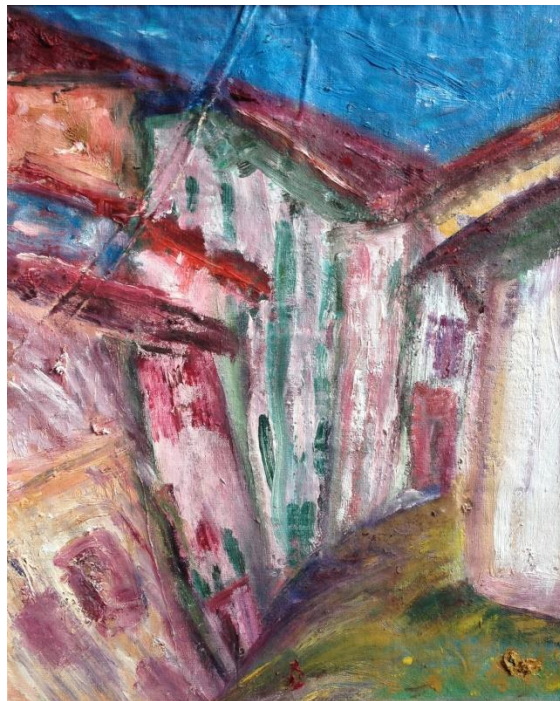
Donibane Garazi,
Oil on canvas,
79 x 76 cm, 2007



Donibane Garazi,
Oil on canvas,
68 x 81 cm, 2007



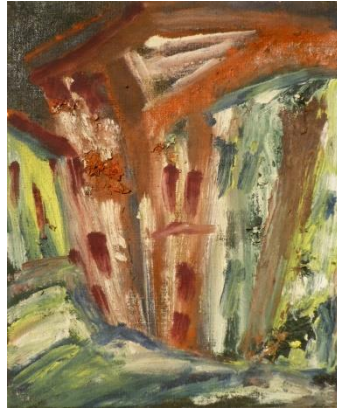
Donibane Garazi,
Oil on canvas,
72 x 54 cm, 2008



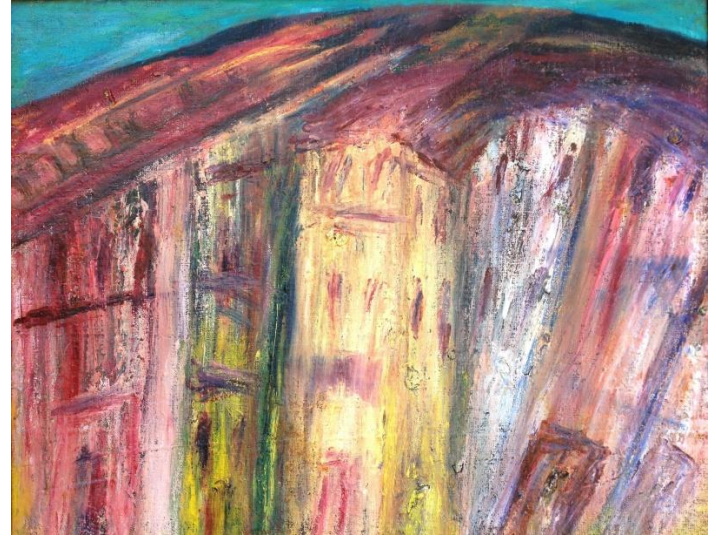
Donibane Garazi,
Oil on canvas,
61 x 50 cm, 2008



Donibane Garazi,
Oil and pigments on canvas,
79 x 58 cm, 2008



Donibane Garazi,
Oil and pigments on
canvas, 60 c 50 cm, 2008



Donibane Garazi,
Oil and pigments on canvas,
78 x 100 cm, 2008



MAISON FRANÇAISE D'OXFORD
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20 - 29 MAY 2017

DAILY, INCLUDING SATURDAYS, SUNDAYS AND BANK HOLIDAY MONDAY

2.00 P.M. - 6.00 P.M. (FRIDAY 26 MAY, 2.00 P.M. - 8.00 P.M.)



Photos: Nicholas Bray