Underdone Potato:
Michelle Grabner

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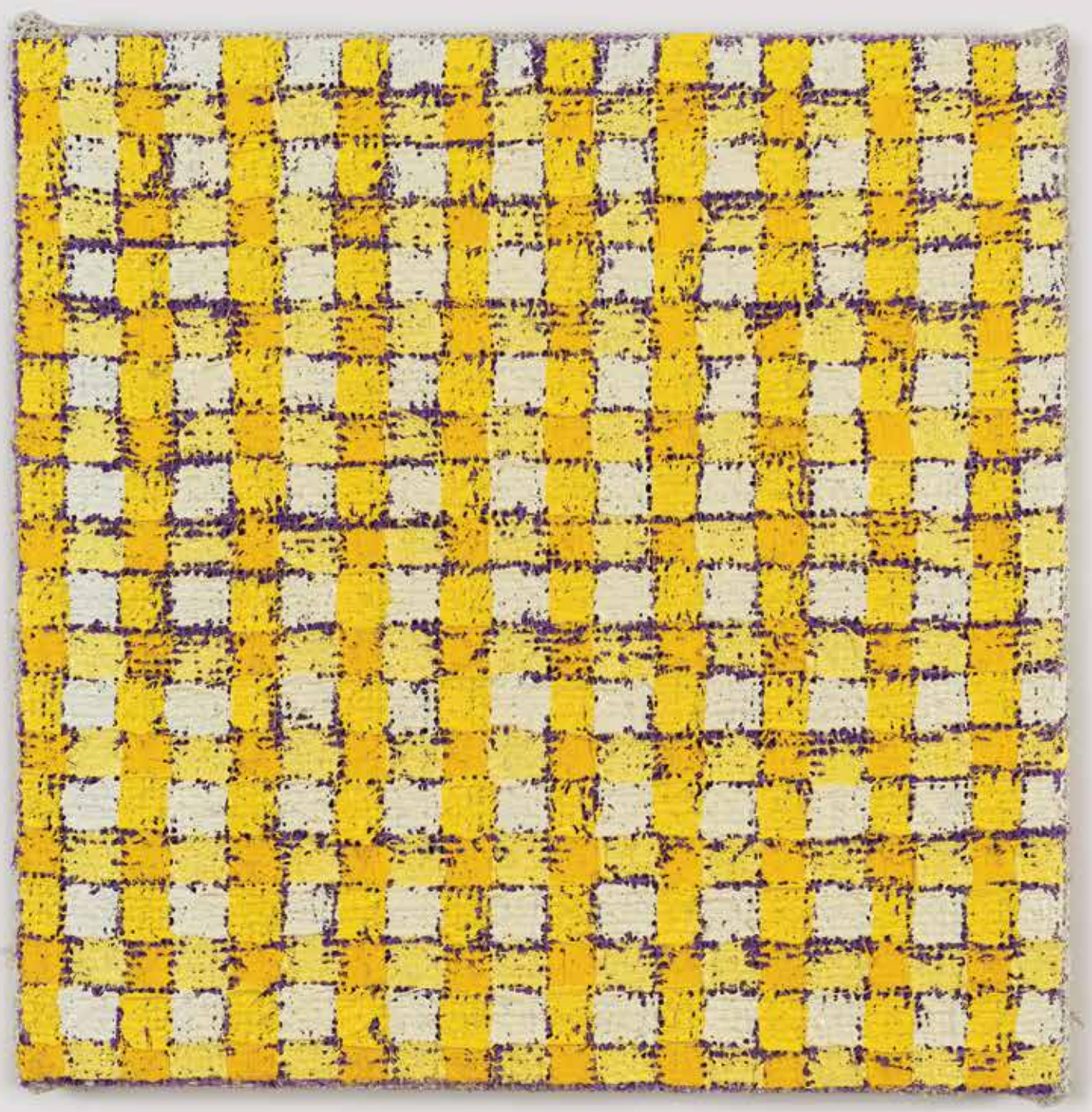
THE SCHNEIDER MUSEUM OF ART

APRIL 17 – AUGUST 9, 2025

SCHNEIDER
MUSEUM of ART

555 Indiana Street, Ashland, OR 97520
541-552-6245 | sma@sou.edu | sma.sou.edu | @schneidermoa

FOREWORD



Untitled, 2019
Oil, acrylic on burlap
10 x 10 in.
Cat. no. 2

We are pleased to present the solo exhibition “Underdone Potato: Michelle Grabner.” An artist, arts educator, critic, and curator, Grabner (b. 1962, Oshkosh, WI) is an important facilitator in today’s contemporary artworld who not only makes meaningful works of art, but has also created new art spaces, curated important exhibitions, and championed many artists. Grabner pushes boundaries of traditional fine art mediums along with compositional structures where you’ll find systems of repetition and patterns. Process is an integral part of her art.

Grabner is an artist who defies conventions, poking against the norms of the clichéd ivory tower within the artworld by grounding her work in the everyday and valuing the labor that goes into making art. In her curatorial projects, she discusses the regions outside the artworld’s metropolitan centers such as New York and Los Angeles as locales that should not be overlooked. As an educator, Grabner has shared apprehension about young artists making sacrifices in order to find a place in the artworld. These nurturing thoughts can be found in the work that Grabner makes and the work she does within the artworld. For instance, in founding The Suburban with her husband and artist Brad Killam on their suburban property in Oak Park, IL, she offered engagement opportunities for their neighborhood by bringing in artists from around the US and abroad. The Suburban started as a small cinderblock structure at eight feet by eight feet square and is testament to the power of creating community and culture with what can be initially thought of as a drop in the bucket compared with the artworld as a whole. This may sound simple enough, but it indeed takes work, time, thought, and commitment. The Suburban became a national sensation and well respected in the art community and thought of as a “cool” place to show if you had the opportunity. It inspired many others to do the same in their respective regions. Today, The Suburban can be found in Milwaukee, WI.

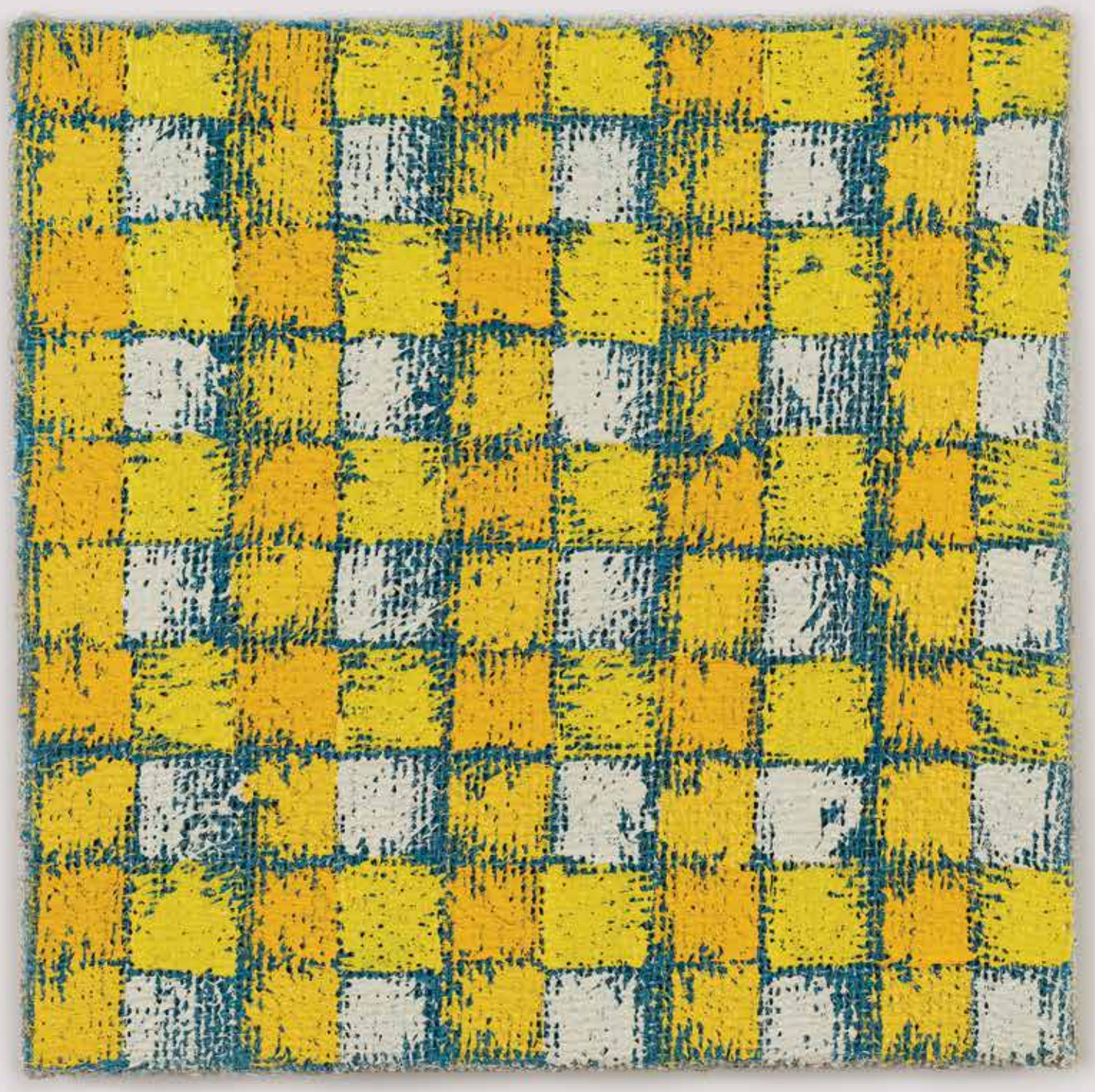
Grabner’s comprehensive approach to the artworld and community was noted by the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, as she was invited to co-curate the 2014 Whitney Biennial with Stuart Comer, Chief Curator of Media and Performance Art at the Museum of Modern Art, and Anthony Elms, Associate Curator at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia. Two years later, here in Oregon, Grabner was sole curator of the Portland Biennial. For this endeavor, Grabner transcended expectations and made the effort to make it an Oregon biennial, conducting over a hundred studio visits around the state and included thirteen cities for biennial exhibitions. It was an exciting time for the Oregon arts ecology.

Michelle Grabner received her MA in Art History and BFA in Painting and Drawing from the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, and an MFA in Art Theory and Practice from Northwestern University. She is currently the Crown Family Professor of Art and the Senior Chair of the Painting and Drawing Department at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where she has taught since 1996. She has also held teaching appointments at the University of Wisconsin–Madison; Cranbrook Academy of Art; Milton Avery Graduate School of Arts—Bard College; Yale University School of Art; and the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Maine. She is a regular contributor to *Artforum*, and her writing has also appeared in *Art in America*, *Frieze*, *Modern Painters*, and *Art-Agenda*. In 2018, Grabner served as the inaugural artistic director of FRONT International, a triennial exhibition in Cleveland and vicinity. In addition to The Suburban, she is founder and co-director of The Poor Farm, with her husband, artist Brad Killam. Grabner is the spring 2025 Visiting Artist and Scholar in Teaching (VAST) resident at Southern Oregon University (SOU), a program sponsored by the Schneider Museum of Art (SMA) and operated by the SMA and SOU's Creative Arts program.

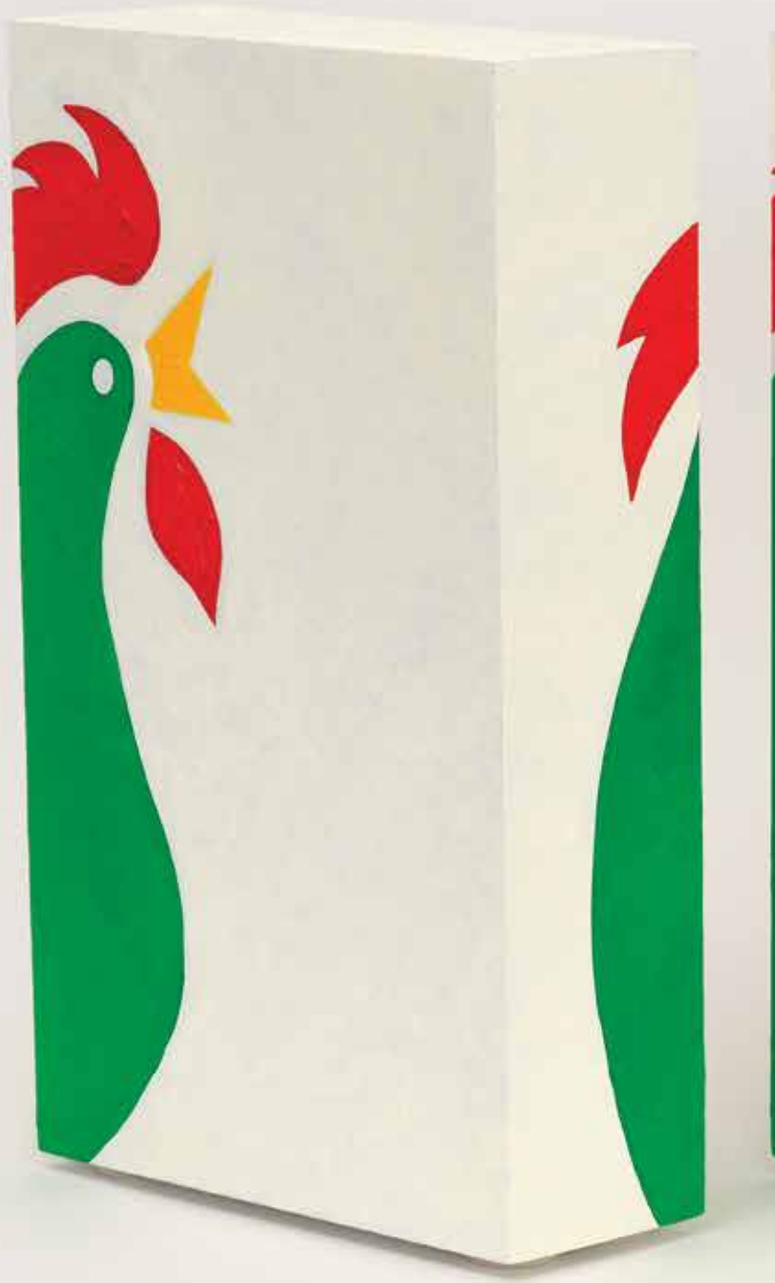
Beyond this museum solo exhibition, Grabner has also been the subject of solo exhibitions at institutions including the Museum of Contemporary Art, Cleveland; Indianapolis Museum of Art; Hedreen Gallery at Seattle University; INOVA, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee; Ulrich Museum, Wichita; and University Galleries, Illinois State University. In 2021, The John Michael Kohler Arts Center in Sheboygan, WI commissioned Grabner to create an artist-built environment for their new Art Preserve building. She has been included in major group exhibitions at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Akron Art Museum; Museum of Contemporary Art, Detroit; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Tate St. Ives, UK; and Kunsthalle Bern, Switzerland. Her work is included in the permanent collections of museums including the Art Institute of Chicago; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Dallas Museum of Art; Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City; Indianapolis Museum of Art; MUDAM, Luxemburg; Milwaukee Art Museum; Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, WI; Knoxville Museum of Art, TN; Sheldon Museum of Art, Lincoln, NE; Daimler Contemporary, Berlin; Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington; and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Grabner lives and works in Milwaukee.

I would like to thank Michelle Grabner for making her artworks available; Patrick Collier for contributing the engaging interview; Sue Taylor for her wonderful essay contextualizing the work; Maureen Williams, our museum Preparator and Gallery manager; Emily McPeck, our Associate Director of Administration and Communication; our student staff; members of our Museum Council—Cindy Barnard, Roberta Bhasin, Sandy Friend, Michele Fulkerson, Mary Gardiner, and Vivian Stubblefield; and School of Arts and Communication Dean, Andrew Gay. Grateful acknowledgment as well for our catalog design by David Ruppe and printing by Brown Printing in Portland, OR.

SCOTT MALBAURN
Executive Director



Untitled, 2019
Oil, acrylic on burlap
10 x 10 in.
Cat. no. 1



Untitled (detail), 2024-25
Solid wood, oil paint
12 units, each 14 x 8 x 3 in.
Overall dimensions variable
Cat. no. 36

ESSAY

Context, Concepts, and Class

by Sue Taylor

At the center of a poignant story on friendship and forgiveness by the Argentine writer Virginia Feinmann, we find the memorable motif of a red-and-white checked tablecloth. Thinking back on her betrayal in the 1970s by a fellow dissident and her resulting capture and imprisonment under Argentina's military dictatorship, the narrator reflects on how she herself, in contrast, had managed not to give up her comrades under torture. She had fixated in the moment of her suffering on a mental image of the gingham tablecloth in her childhood home. "We used it in the kitchen," she recalls, "all of us together when my father came home from work and mother had the stuffed ravioli ready and my brother was finishing his chores, and this tablecloth stuck in my mind, and I decided that I wouldn't talk, . . . that I would take care not to let others go through what I was going through, that I wouldn't talk."[1] Feinmann's is a dramatic example of a domestic object's aura of familial warmth. Viewers of this exhibition will no doubt bring their own associations to Michelle Grabner's painted iterations of the common gingham tablecloth. Personal reminiscences may be triggered—a spaghetti supper, a picnic on the grass. All this regardless of the the artist's intentions and despite the neutrality of the grid, that non-hierarchical structure Grabner employs in these paintings to explore color, composition, and material support. If the grid announces, as Rosalind Krauss once claimed, "modern art's will to silence, its hostility to literature, to narrative, to discourse,"[2] Grabner's recapitulations open the grid to emotion and memory.

So numerous are her oil-on-burlap paintings mimicking gingham that they may begin to seem formulaic, and in a way they are, like a theme and variation in music. Yet close looking reveals each one's intricacy and singularity. The four-color, ten-inch-square *Untitled* (cat. no. 7, p. 21) appears identical to *Untitled* (cat. no. 8, p. 21), until we realize that the underlying greens are different, one forest green and the other mint. *Untitled* (cat. no. 12, p. 20) and *Untitled* (cat. no. 18, p. 35) rely on a similar palette as *Untitled* (cat. no. 7, p. 21), but they are rectangular rather than square, and the individual color patches that make up *Untitled* (cat. no. 12, p. 20) are 1/4 inch rather than 1/2 inch, giving it a busier aspect than its color cognates. Other nuances emerge. *Untitled* (cat. no. 6, p. 22) is the coloristic inverse of *Untitled* (cat. no. 5, p. 19): Grabner switched the roles of the complementaries, now using red as her ground rather than green and superimposing upon it squares of white and greens as opposed to white and salmon pinks. And so on. Although at first glance all seems regular, predictable, it is something of a surprise to find that the vertical rows along the left and right edges of all these paintings do not match, nor do the horizontal rows at the top and bottom. Except for the special case of *Untitled* (cat. no. 15, p. 32), where the left and right sides do match, but the top and bottom do not.

Among her predecessors who used of the grid as a device for painting—Josef Albers, Jasper Johns, Paul Klee, Agnes Martin, Piet Mondrian—Grabner is unique, for while she exploits the grid as a means of organizing a two-dimensional surface, she also presses it into the service of representation, depicting gingham cloth. And there are further differences. Krauss noted two ways a painted grid relates to ambient (that is, real) space. Sometimes, the grid seems clearly delimited within the work of art, stopping short of its edge; in other cases, we can imagine the grid continuing in all directions, as if we were looking at a small section of some larger, even infinitely larger, fabric. The latter reading, Krauss argued, "posits the theoretical continuity of the work of art with the world."[3] Grabner's gingham paintings trouble this distinction, positing in addition a continuity with the world on the level of subject matter.

Because we always have a referent in mind—some Platonic checked tablecloth, so to speak—we are predisposed to interpret the ten-inch paintings (inadequate to cover any ordinary table) as fragments of greater wholes. Contradicting this reading is our sense of the paintings as discrete objects, complete in and of themselves. Occasionally the plaid pattern seems to end just at the painting's edge—for example along the right sides of *Untitled* (cat. no. 2, p. 4) and *Untitled* (cat. no. 11, p. 24)—allowing the solid underpainting to show, revealing the grid as finite. The burlap support, with its visible warp and weft, echoes the depicted grid in actual crisscrossing fibers, while the coarse weave resists the smooth application of paint, heightening our awareness of each brushstroke and of the overall handmadeness of the object. Moreover, with its practical uses in transporting or storing comestibles from potatoes to coffee beans, burlap establishes yet another link between the work of art and the real world.

Grabner relinquishes the real-world referent in the white-on-white *Untitled* (cat. no. 26, p. 45) and *Untitled* (cat. no. 27, p. 46), meditations on the weave of cloth itself. In a curious process involving subtraction, transfer, and addition, she removed some of the strands that make up a swatch of burlap, then spray-painted an impression of the altered cloth onto a linen support, and finally painstakingly applied oil paint to the negative areas of the impression. Here painting is exposed as a material process. The artist has explained her persistent interest in "the now defunct tension between painting and weaving, crafts and the fine arts," hoping in paintings like these, she says, "to reinvigorate some of the power struggles between burlap and linen, the loom and stretcher, and concepts of labor and work."[4] She employs a similar approach and reductive palette in *Untitled* (cat. no. 24, p. 42) and *Untitled* (cat. no. 25, p. 41), both evidently derived from the same lace-patterned placemat, tablecloth, or curtain. Here the painting enjoys a direct, indexical relationship to its household referent: Grabner imprinted the decorative matrix onto her linen ground with enamel, then, as above, filled in the negative areas with numerous tiny dabs of oil paint.

All this indicates an acute sensitivity to the fraught status of painting during Grabner's formative years as a visual artist, in the late 1980s and 1990s. In the wake of modernism's trajectory towards total abstraction, when not just representation but any kind of fictive pictorial space was deemed an assault on truth, painting's very viability came into question. While conservative painters still clung to timeless, ahistorical conceptions of their medium, other artists had already abandoned painting for minimalist sculpture, photography, video, or installation. Grabner and her contemporaries had to grapple with influential critiques of painting and to figure out how to continue despite them—while also taking serious account of them. Paintings that depict flat surfaces rather than objects in space signal an awareness of their historical moment and their grounding in postmodern discourse. Examples include Grabner's ginghams,

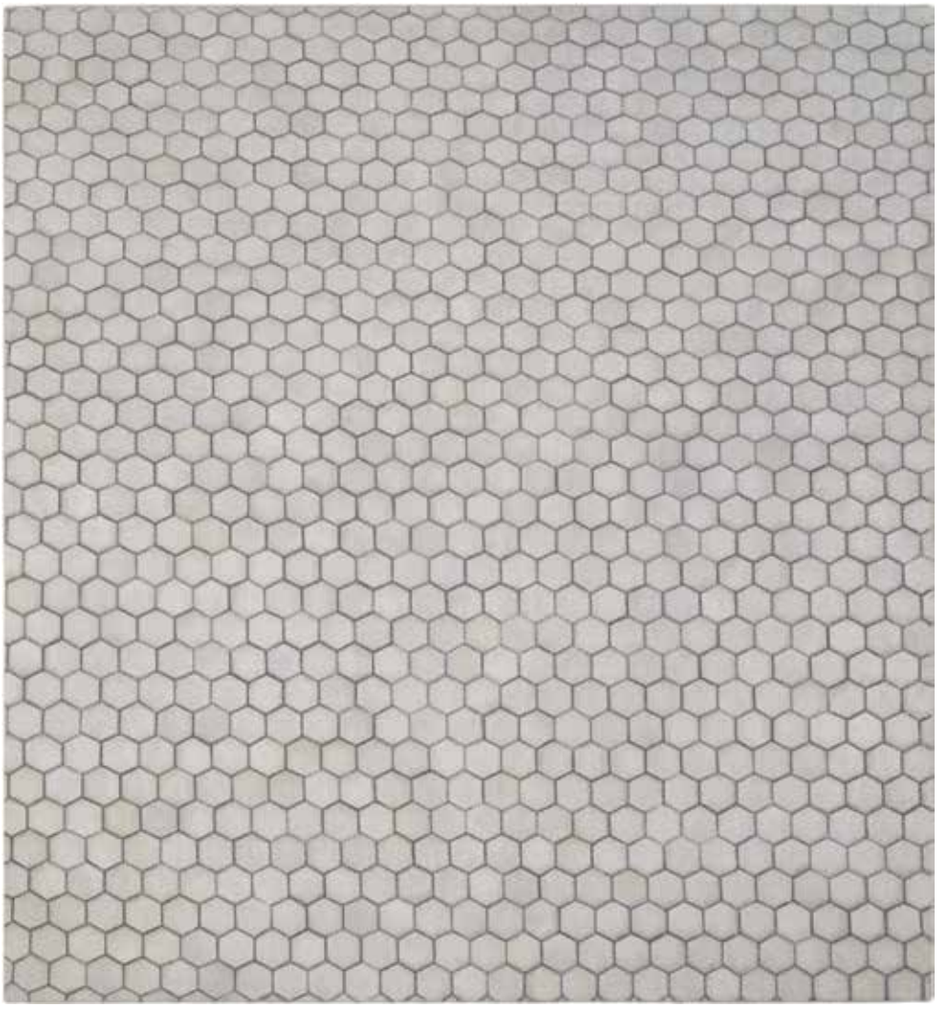


Fig. 1. Julia Fish (American, b. 1950), *Floor*, 1993, oil on canvas, 29 x 27 in. Collection of Ivan Moskowitz and Jolie Nahigian, Chicago (Photo: Tom Van Eynde, courtesy of Julia Fish)

Julia Fish's tiled floors (fig. 1), and Sherrie Levine's checks and game boards, all of which affirm the two-dimensional picture plane while also representing familiar patterns from the world beyond the frame.

Beginning in the mid-1980s, Levine created a canny series of "Knot Paintings," bare plywood panels whose knots were obscured with pointed elliptical shapes in a single color—white, gold, copper, pink—and whose undulating vertical grain stood in for brushstrokes. Ironic advertisements for the modernist insistence on truth to materials, these works punned on the knotty problem of painting's contested possibilities. Similarly self-aware, Grabner's wood reliefs in this exhibition are "not paintings" either. Embedded in each walnut panel (cat. nos. 28-30, pp. 50–52) are jar lids from storebought jam, arrayed like stars in the night sky but evoking nothing so lofty; they come from the kitchen shelf with an air of everyday life about them. Some retain their commercially printed checked patterns; others are bronzed or patinaed like ancient artifacts. Toying in these untitled reliefs with the life-art dichotomy, Grabner also points self-referentially to her own oeuvre, the jar lids conjuring her gingham paintings or the surfaces of her cast-bronze domestic textiles.

These latter include the extraordinary crocheted blanket or throw (cat. no. 32, p. 49), monumentalized for the ages and propped up in this exhibition against the gallery wall. Despite the sculpture's apparently casual placement, its medium announces the coverlet's elevation: bronze, with its millennia-long use

in statues of heroes and kings, carries with it inevitable associations of nobility. Always implicit in bronze sculpture is an idea of the subject's worthiness, an indication of cultural and/or historical value. For this reason, it was a provocative political gesture for Kiki Smith to create a bronze *Womb* in 1986, redirecting the valorization typically accorded mounted male warriors in public plazas to the internal female organ that sponsors human life. Likewise co-opting the "bronze effect," Grabner in her fringed blanket exalts not just the humble object itself but also the female labor that went into it, famously ridiculed by Mike Kelley in *More Love Hours than Can Ever Be Repaid* (1987), his huge wall-mounted assemblage of thrift-shop finds—handmade rag dolls, knitted and crocheted shawls and afghans—that evinced for him only excessive emotional investment and untold wasted time. Honoring rather than devaluing the craft skills and unpaid labor of anonymous grandmothers, mothers, and aunts, Grabner's sculpture memorializes family connections and family history in a way reminiscent of bronzed baby shoes on knickknack shelves in the living room or den.

From the linen closet come the fabric sources for Grabner's wall-mounted, cast-bronze folded lengths of lacy material (cat. no. 33, p. 48), the kind used for table runners, antimacassars, or window curtains in the middle-class home. Transposing these soft and pliable materials into an obdurate medium is the opposite of what Claes Oldenburg did for typewriters, toilets, and fans in the 1960s. His strategy for sculpture also involved inflating common objects such as clothespins or lipsticks to an outsized scale, echoed across the decades in this exhibition by Grabner's giant barrettes (cat. no. 34), hair accessories for Alice once she obliges the "EAT-ME" cake in Wonderland. Pop artists like Oldenburg mined the everyday and collapsed the high-low cultural divide; additionally important for Grabner, they undermined concepts of authenticity and originality with cheerful appropriations from advertising and the media. In Warhol's pilfered Campbell's soup can, as in his professed desire to be a machine, we see an explicit rejection of the old artistic values. Grabner brings his enterprise home in *Untitled* (cat. no. 36, p. 8), a series of simulated cereal boxes in painted wood, subsuming as subject matter both the breakfast food and its chirpy package design. Recalling the famous painted-wood *Brillo Box* (1964), which also exists in multiple versions, Grabner's dozen cornflake boxes retain the stylized Kellogg rooster but without the need for a brand name.

Also alluding to consumption in the home are the steel ham cans that make up *Untitled* (cat. no. 37, p. 25). The cans are emptied of their contents, made precious with silver leaf, and exhibited in a scattered array on the gallery floor. Precooked, preserved, and perfect for sandwiches, canned ham feeds working families; Grabner's tins thus carry class overtones and become upwardly mobile as art.[5] Unlike the wood cereal boxes, the tins are actual, storebought, readymade objects; the silvery surface treatment helps transform them and adds nuance to the artist's selection and isolation of them from the flux of everyday reality. As an assisted readymade, *Untitled* (cat. no. 37, p. 25) sits at one end of an originality scale in Grabner's overall oeuvre, with imitations on the other end and copies in the middle.[6] Imitations, inspired by but not identical to their models and requiring of the artist numerous creative decisions, include the gingham paintings and cornflake boxes; copies, in contrast, attempt exactly to replicate their models and are exemplified in this exhibition by the remarkable cast-bronze potatoes (cat. no. 38). Engaging the copy, a kind of forgery of the real, Grabner prompts us in this and other works to think deeply about our expectations of art.

More systematically than Pop artists before them, certain contemporary artists have questioned the very construct of originality—most notoriously, Sherrie Levine with her rephotographed photographs by Walker Evans and Edward

Weston and her watercolors after Matisse and Franz Marc. At the same time in the early 1980s that Levine's blatant copies disturbed the artworld, Vija Celmins produced another kind of copy, of small stones she picked up in the desert of northern New Mexico.[7] Cast in bronze and painted with acrylic to duplicate the colors of the eleven "original" pebbles, Celmins' tiny sculptures were presented side by side with their models in *To Fix the Image in Memory* (1977-82). Celmins copied nature, not art as in Levine, and challenged her viewers to tell the difference. Like Celmins' stones, Grabner's trompe-l'oeil potatoes are still-life sculpture whose forms are totally unoriginal and whose content is the opposite. And there's more. Potatoes are perishable; in her bronze replicas, Grabner renders them permanent. If they are distantly related to the wax fruit displayed in bowls in the Victorian parlor, they could never be used as decor, and Grabner arranges them in an apparently haphazard heap. For centuries a cheap source of nutrition, potatoes are a humble staple all over the world, a boon to the poor and working class, yet extolled here as *objets d'art*.

Potatoes became photographic subjects in a hilarious series by Anna and Bernhard Blume, *Kitchen Frenzy* (1986, fig. 2), which impressed Grabner greatly when the couple exhibited their work in the 1990s at the Milwaukee Art Museum.[8] Playing the role of a German *Hausfrau*, Anna Blume in these photos loses control of her

Fig. 2. Anna and Bernhard Blume (German, 1936–2020 and 1937–2011, respectively), *Kitchen Frenzy* (details), 1986, Gelatin silver prints, each 66 15/16 x 42 1/2 in. Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of the Contemporary Arts Council of The Museum of Modern Art, 156.1989.d-e (Photo: Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, N.Y.)

bürgerlich environment and struggles to cope with the unruly vegetables. She has a lot going on. Her predicament provides a rich allegory for that of modern woman, with so many balls in the air on the home front as well as in the workplace, risking failure and/or exhaustion at every turn. One can see the appeal of this work for Grabner, whose roles as wife and mother she has not sequestered from her multiple public roles as artist, educator, administrator, gallerist, curator. Indeed, her repeated return to domestic subject matter in her art is complemented by her strategic assimilation of home and family into her professional activities. With her artist-husband, Brad Killam, Grabner runs two international exhibition and residency programs, The Suburban and The Poor Farm, and she includes family photographs as well as videos, essays, and interviews by her children in exhibitions and catalogs of her art. The paintings and sculptural installations presented in "Underdone Potato: Michelle Grabner," informed by her sophisticated knowledge of aesthetic theory and feminist critique, represent only one aspect of her practice; she identifies as a conceptual artist. In the totality of her work, she demonstrates like Feinmann's protagonist how the personal can support the political, and she achieves as well what the historical avant-gardes set as their ultimate goal: a complete integration of art and life.

SUE TAYLOR is an art historian, curator, and critic and Professor Emerita of Art History at Portland State University. Her articles and exhibition and book reviews have appeared in *American Art*, *American Craft, Art in America, Art Journal*, *Art News*, *ArtUS, Chicago Sun-Times, Dialogue*, *Fiberarts*, *New Art Examiner*, and *Oregon ArtsWatch*. She is the author of numerous catalog essays and of two monographs, *Hans Bellmer: The Anatomy of Anxiety* (MIT Press, 2000) and *Grant Wood's Secrets* (University of Delaware Press, 2020).

ENDNOTES

1. Virginia Feinmann, "Gloria," *Página 12*, 18 February 2014 (my translation).

2. Rosalind E. Krauss, "Grids," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986), 9.

3. Ibid., 21.

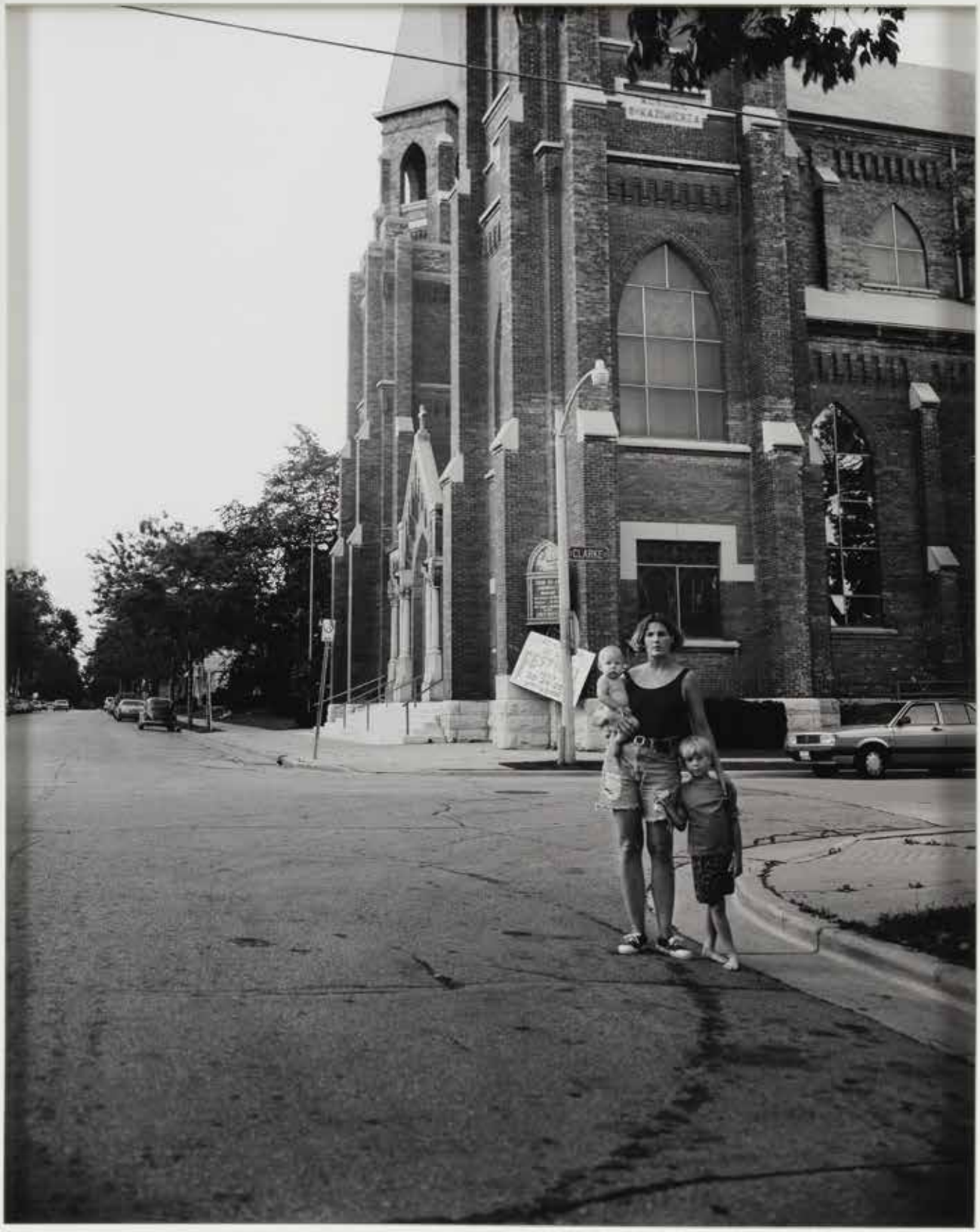
4. Michelle Grabner, "Michelle Grabner with Barry Schwabsky," in INOVA, *Michelle Grabner: The INOVA Survey* (Milwaukee, WI: INOVA and Green Gallery Press, 2012), 67.

5. Like sardine cans, these ham cans open with a pop top but once came with a key for rolling back the lid. The analogy may put some viewers in mind of the anecdote shared by Jacques Lacan to illustrate his theory of the gaze, much cited in art discourse in the 1980s and 1990s. Lacan remembered his chagrin when, on a boat with some fishermen off the coast of Brittany, he became the butt of a senseless joke by one of them who, pointing to an empty sardine can floating on the sea, asked, "You see that can? Do you see it? Well, it doesn't see you!" Lacan's subsequent meditation on vision aside, what impressed him profoundly about this experience was the awkward class difference between him and "those fellows who were earning their livings with great difficulty," Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan, vol. 11, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1978), 95-96.

6. See Richard Schiff, "Originality," in Robert S. Nelson and Schiff, eds., *Critical Terms for Art History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 106.

7. Ibid., 110-15.

8. The exhibition, "Anna and Bernhard Blume: Photo-Works," ran from February 9 through April 21, 1996. See Michelle Grabner, lecture for the Society for Contemporary Art, Art Institute of Chicago, January 18, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_k8gLj3vRWI&t=1108s.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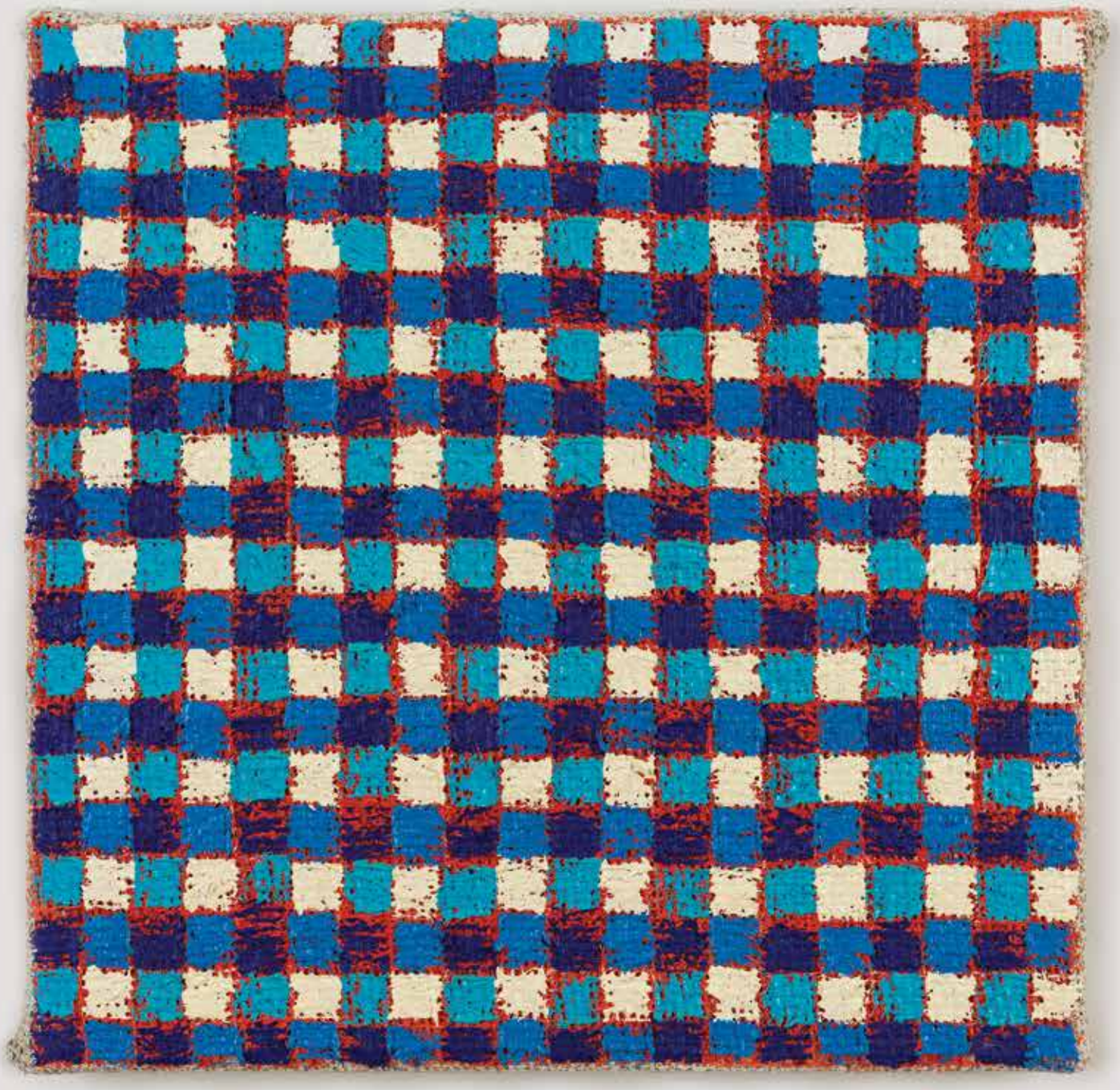
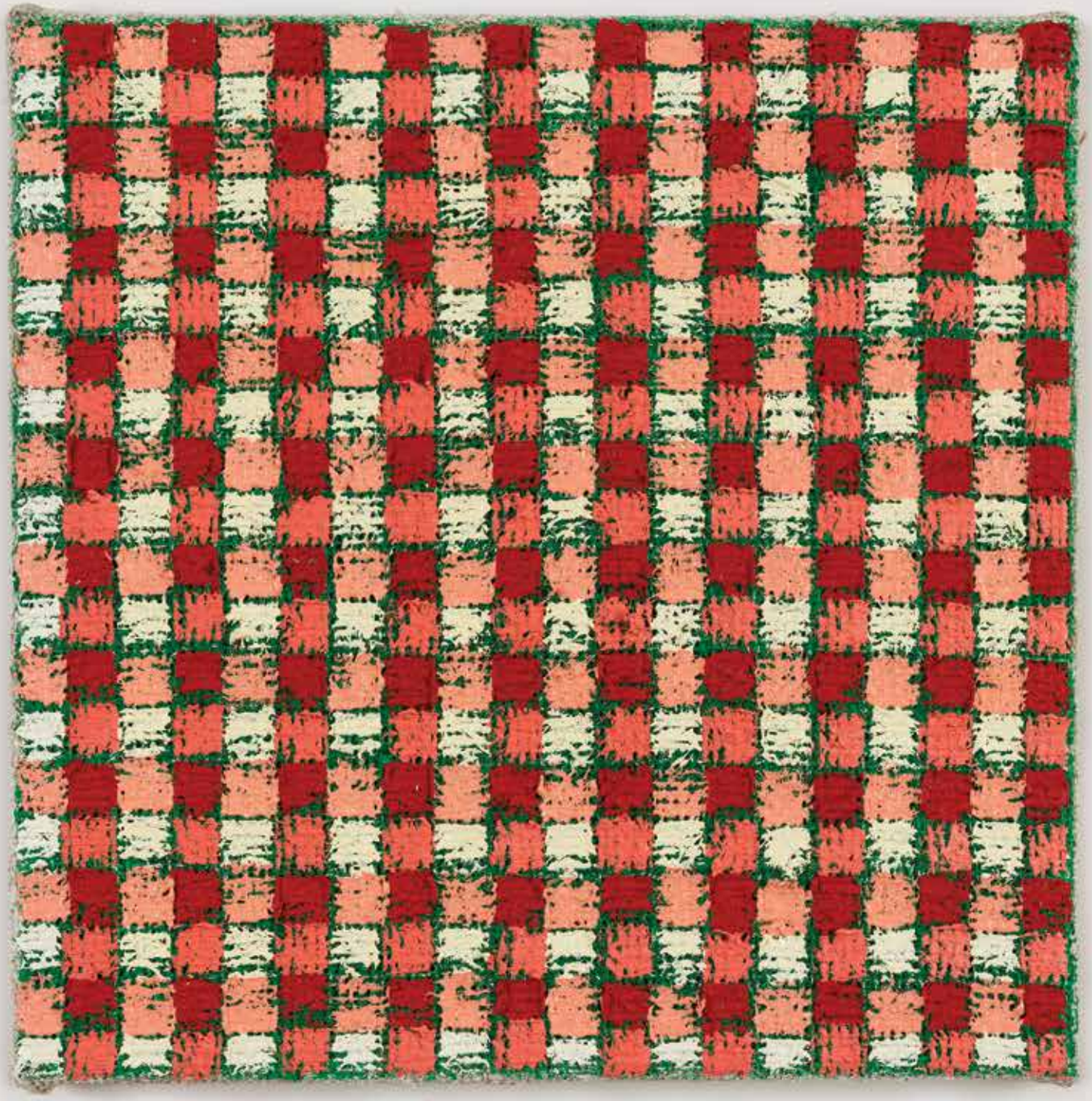


Untitled, 2019
Oil, acrylic on burlap
10 x 10 in.
Cat. no. 3



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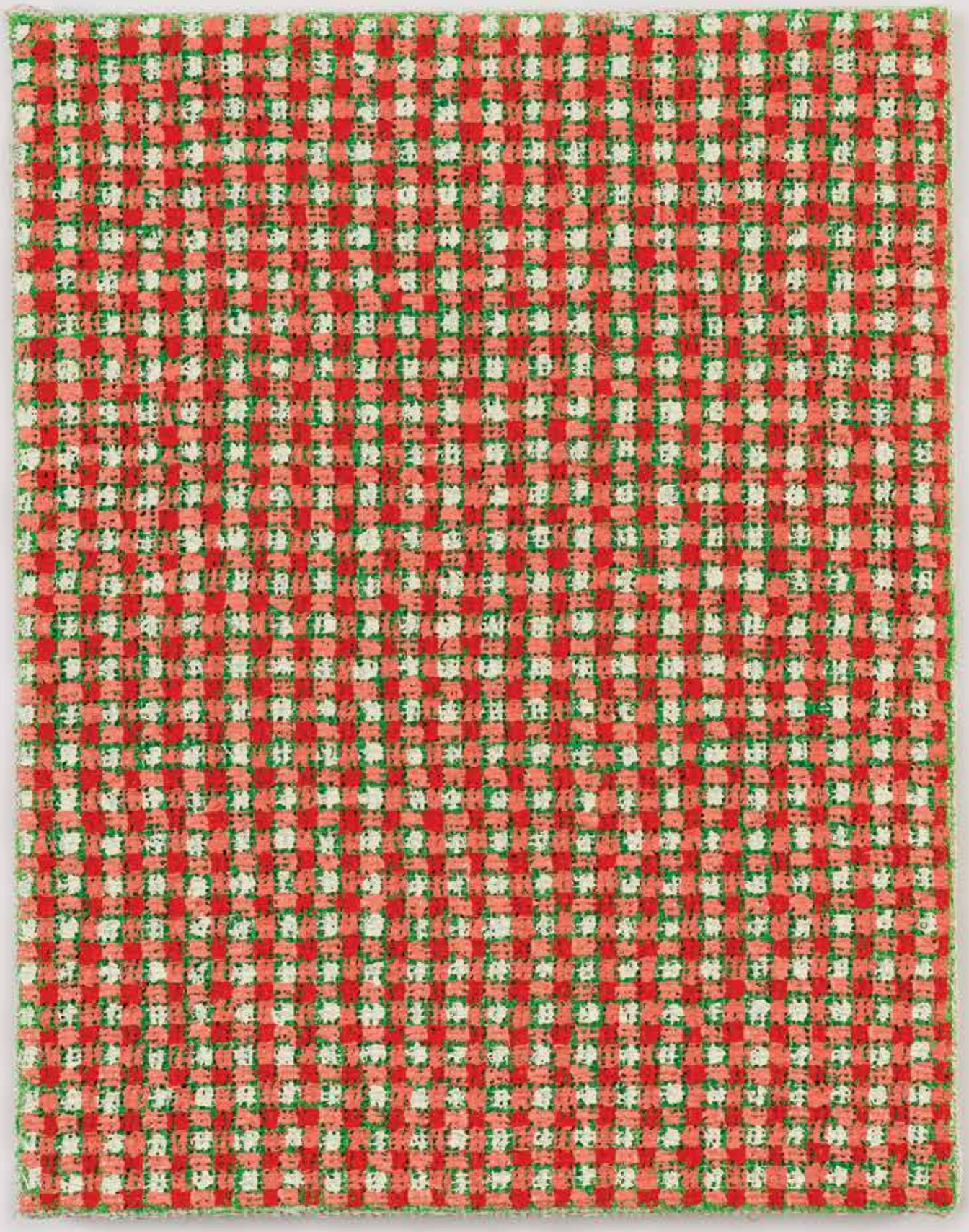

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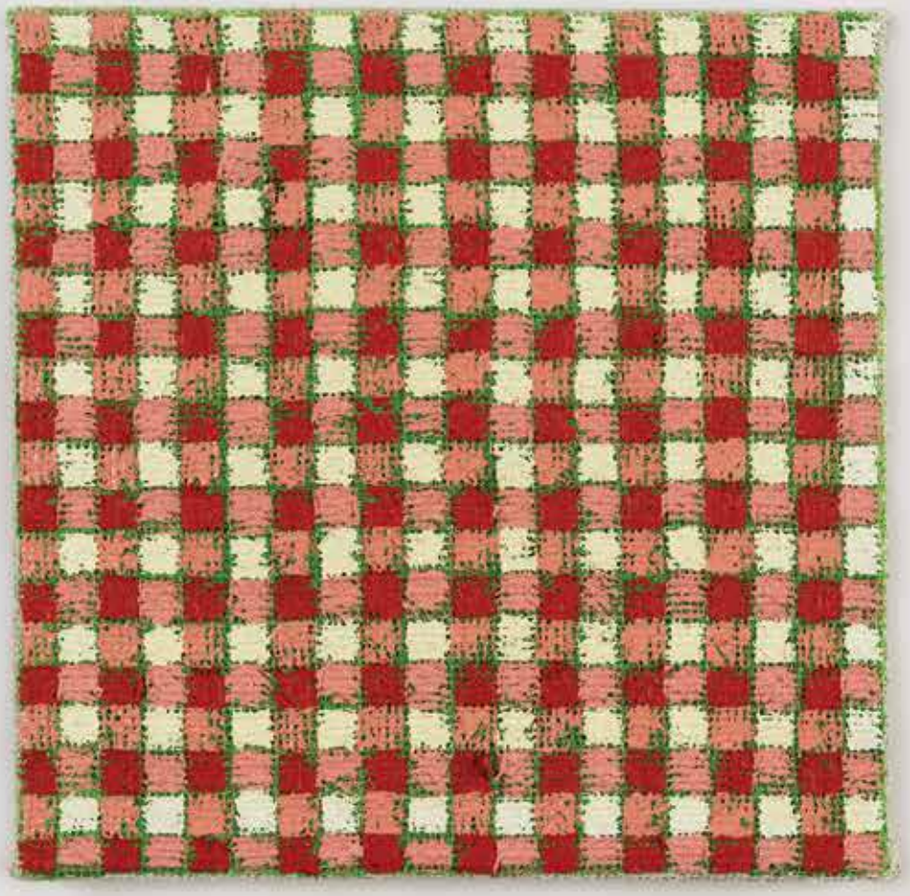

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Oil, acrylic on burlap
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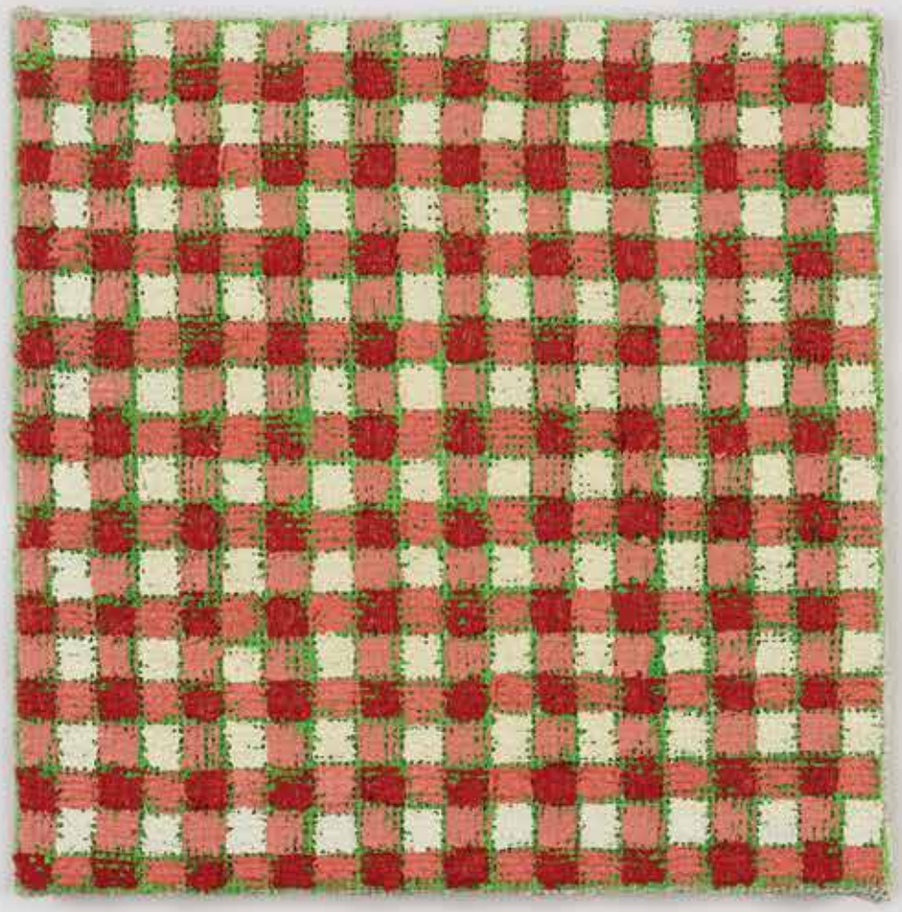
Cat. no. 7



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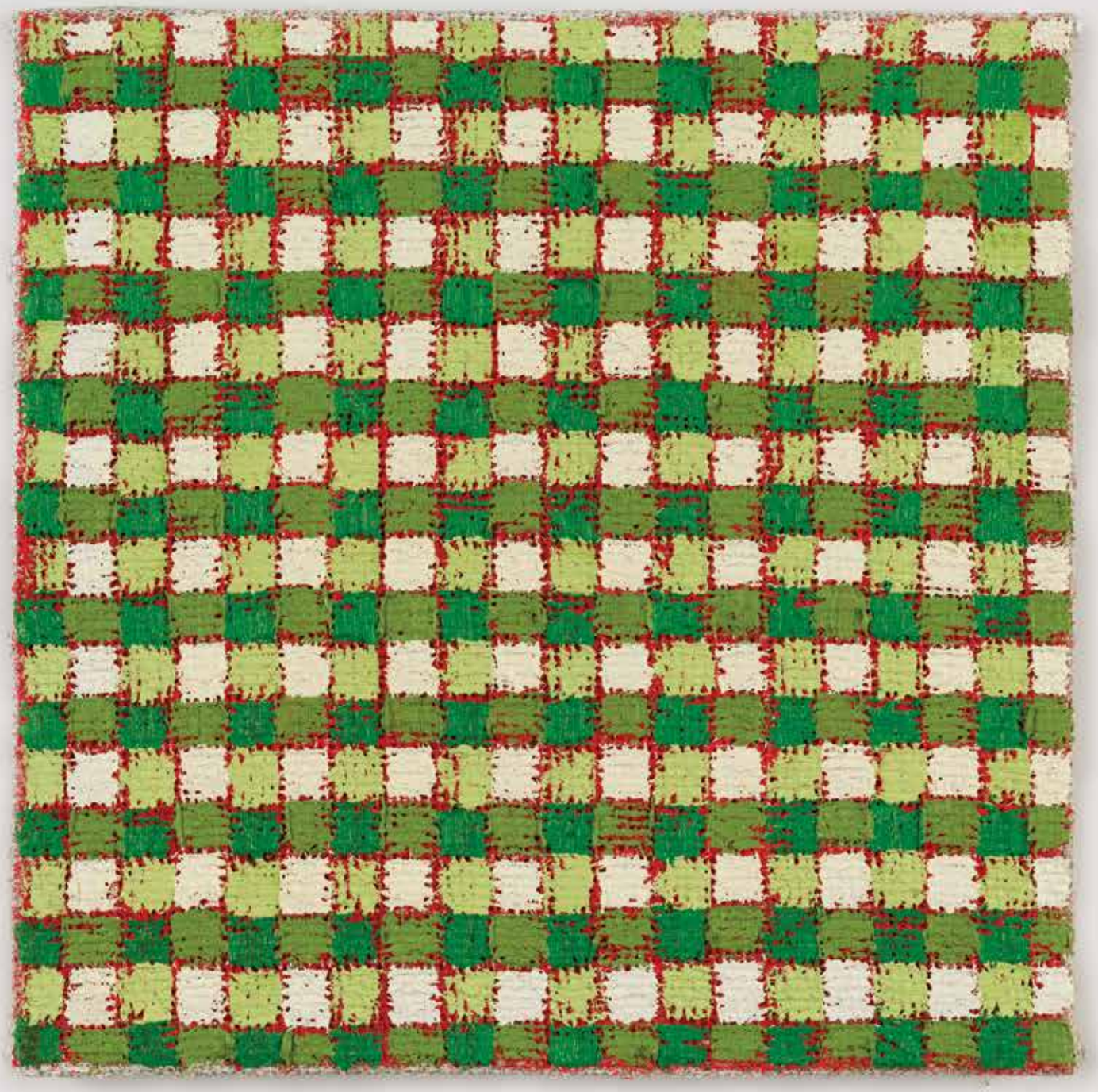

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Cat. no. 6

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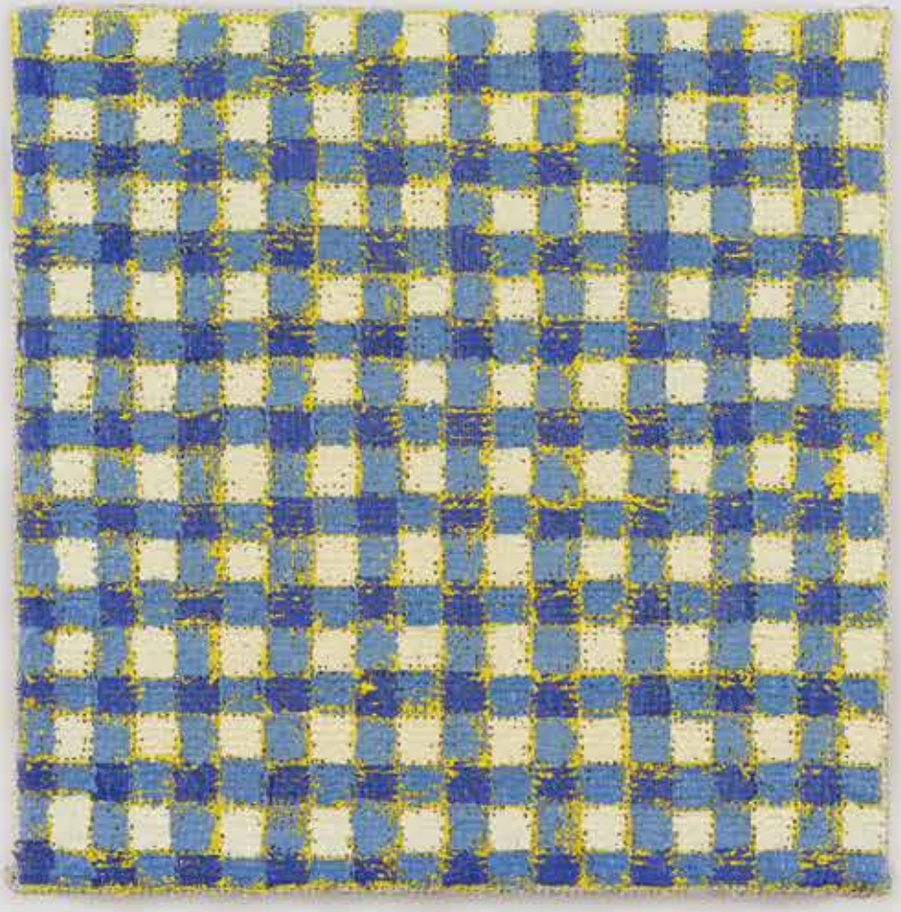

Untitled, 2019
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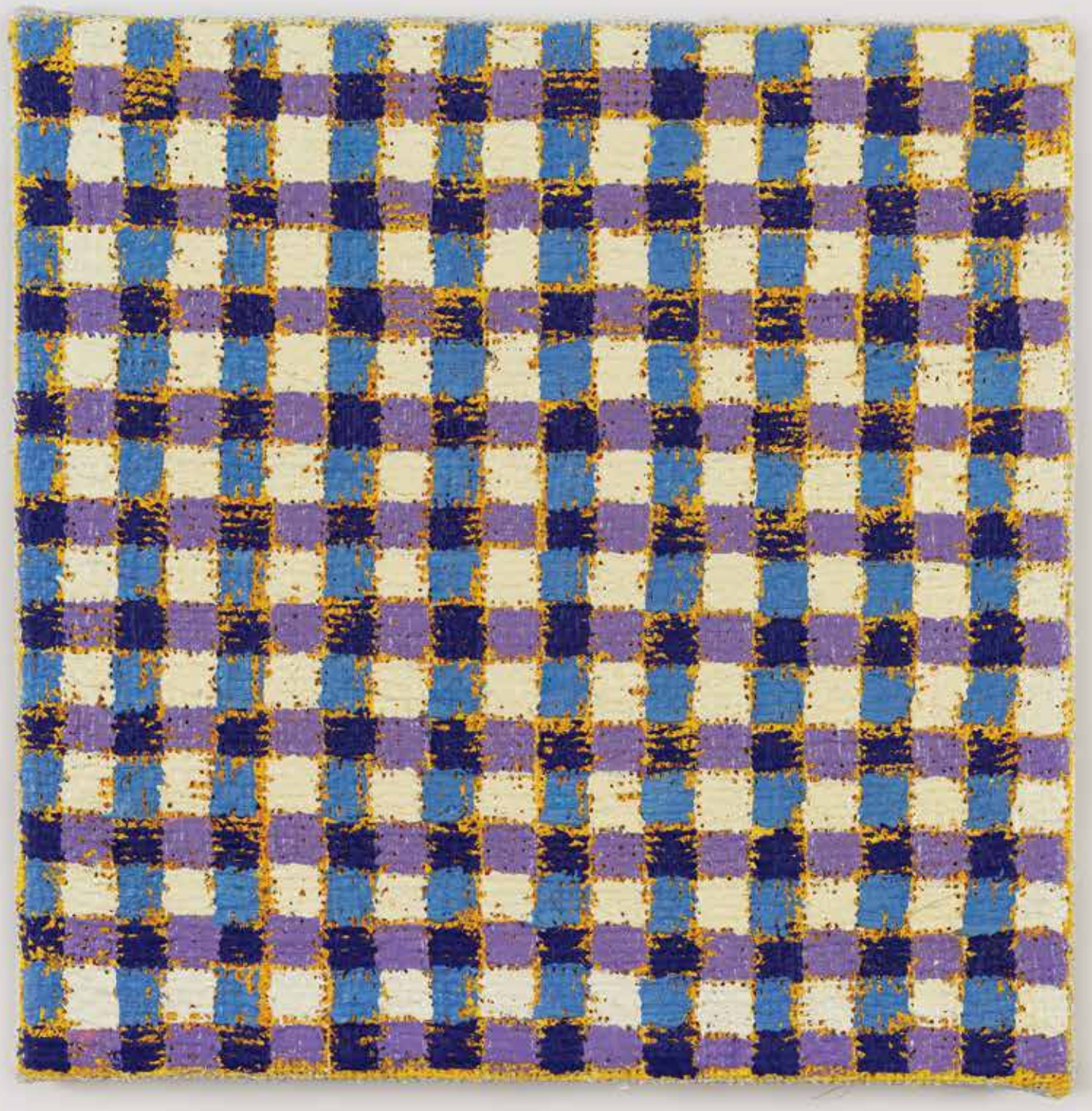
Cat. no. 10



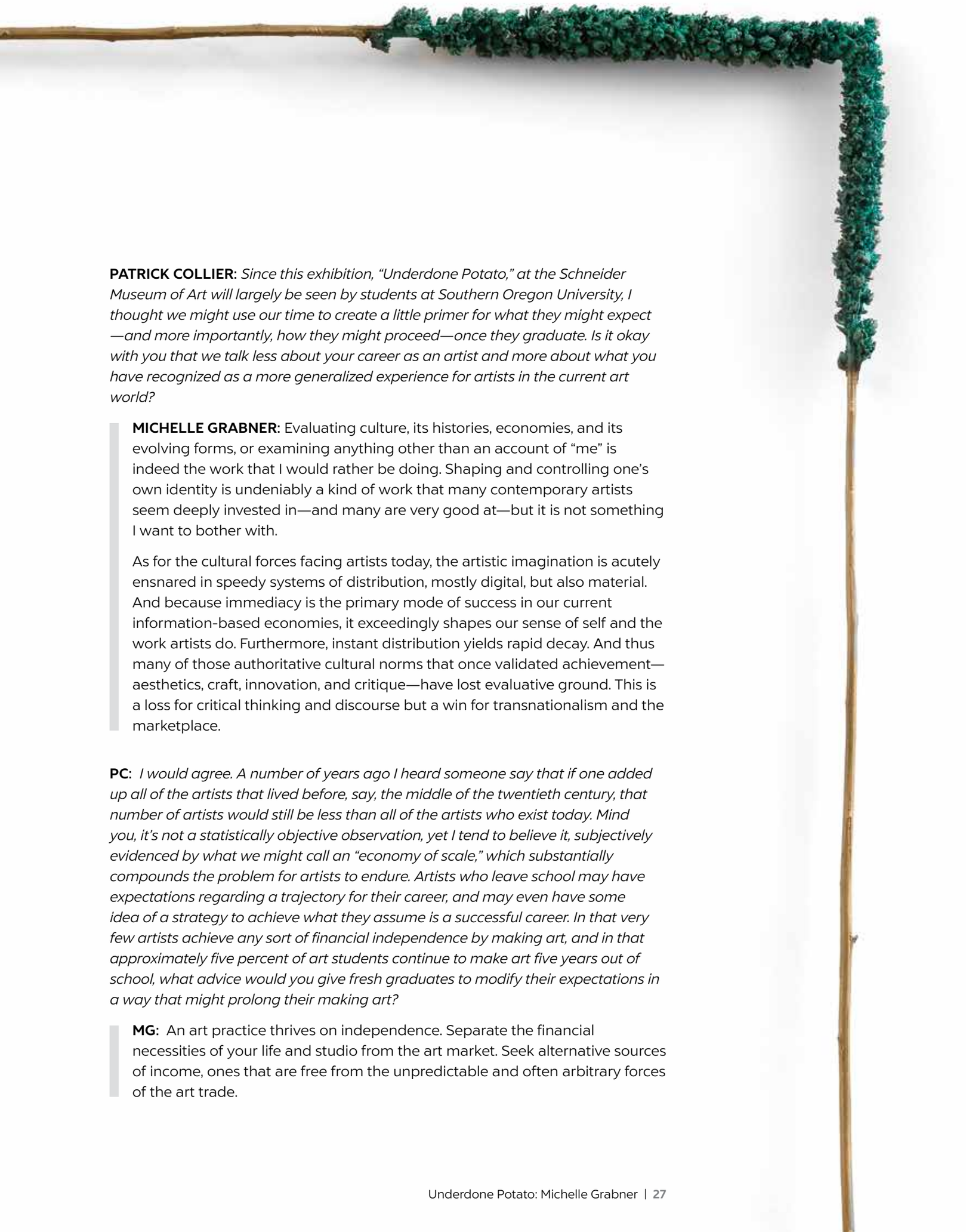
Untitled, 2019
Oil, acrylic on burlap
10 x 10 in.
Cat. no. 11

Untitled, 2024-25
Steel ham tins, silver leaf
23 units, each 4 x 10 1/2 x 5 1/2 in.
Overall dimensions variable
Courtesy of James Cohan Gallery,
New York (Photo: Dan Bradica)
Cat. no. 37

INTERVIEW

An Artist for the Long Haul

Patrick Collier and Michelle Grabner in Conversation



PATRICK COLLIER: *Since this exhibition, "Underdone Potato," at the Schneider Museum of Art will largely be seen by students at Southern Oregon University, I thought we might use our time to create a little primer for what they might expect —and more importantly, how they might proceed—once they graduate. Is it okay with you that we talk less about your career as an artist and more about what you have recognized as a more generalized experience for artists in the current art world?*

> **MICHELLE GRABNER:** Evaluating culture, its histories, economies, and its evolving forms, or examining anything other than an account of "me" is indeed the work that I would rather be doing. Shaping and controlling one's own identity is undeniably a kind of work that many contemporary artists seem deeply invested in—and many are very good at—but it is not something I want to bother with.
>
> As for the cultural forces facing artists today, the artistic imagination is acutely ensnared in speedy systems of distribution, mostly digital, but also material. And because immediacy is the primary mode of success in our current information-based economies, it exceedingly shapes our sense of self and the work artists do. Furthermore, instant distribution yields rapid decay. And thus many of those authoritative cultural norms that once validated achievement—aesthetics, craft, innovation, and critique—have lost evaluative ground. This is a loss for critical thinking and discourse but a win for transnationalism and the marketplace.

PC: *I would agree. A number of years ago I heard someone say that if one added up all of the artists that lived before, say, the middle of the twentieth century, that number of artists would still be less than all of the artists who exist today. Mind you, it's not a statistically objective observation, yet I tend to believe it, subjectively evidenced by what we might call an "economy of scale," which substantially compounds the problem for artists to endure. Artists who leave school may have expectations regarding a trajectory for their career, and may even have some idea of a strategy to achieve what they assume is a successful career. In that very few artists achieve any sort of financial independence by making art, and in that approximately five percent of art students continue to make art five years out of school, what advice would you give fresh graduates to modify their expectations in a way that might prolong their making art?*

> **MG:** An art practice thrives on independence. Separate the financial necessities of your life and studio from the art market. Seek alternative sources of income, ones that are free from the unpredictable and often arbitrary forces of the art trade.

PC: *And as a follow-up, what misconceptions and self-defeating tendencies do you find in young art graduates that may hinder their career?*

> **MG:** Letting the hubris and idealism of youth be wasted on too much self-expression and identity work.

PC: *If taken as advice, this particular insight of yours may require hindsight —after many years of trial and error— to sink in! Yet, it brings to mind something that I've wondered about for many years. You and I have known each other since the early 1990s. I still remember an early painting of yours that is quite different from your trajectory over the greater part of your career. It was a small canvas, perhaps 18" x by 24" inches, and it was very figurative, perhaps even regionally influenced as it was almost a collage of cultural markers. Can you speak to when and why your thematic transition took place?*

> **MG:** I was ashamed of this work for a long time but now I recognize it as foundational, necessary work. Work to be outgrown. The transition away from this work happened gradually as my world grew. I learned in my early studies and through looking at a great deal of artwork that art can also be political, ironic, difficult, formal, and repetitive. It took me a while but I eventually learned that I didn't need to be an artist to remind me of who I am. I discovered that I needed to be an artist to remind me of who I am not.

PC: *Of who you are not? Another puzzle for students to consider! You credit looking at massive amounts of art to help you grow, yet I wonder what value you place on the process of writing about other artists in your development.*

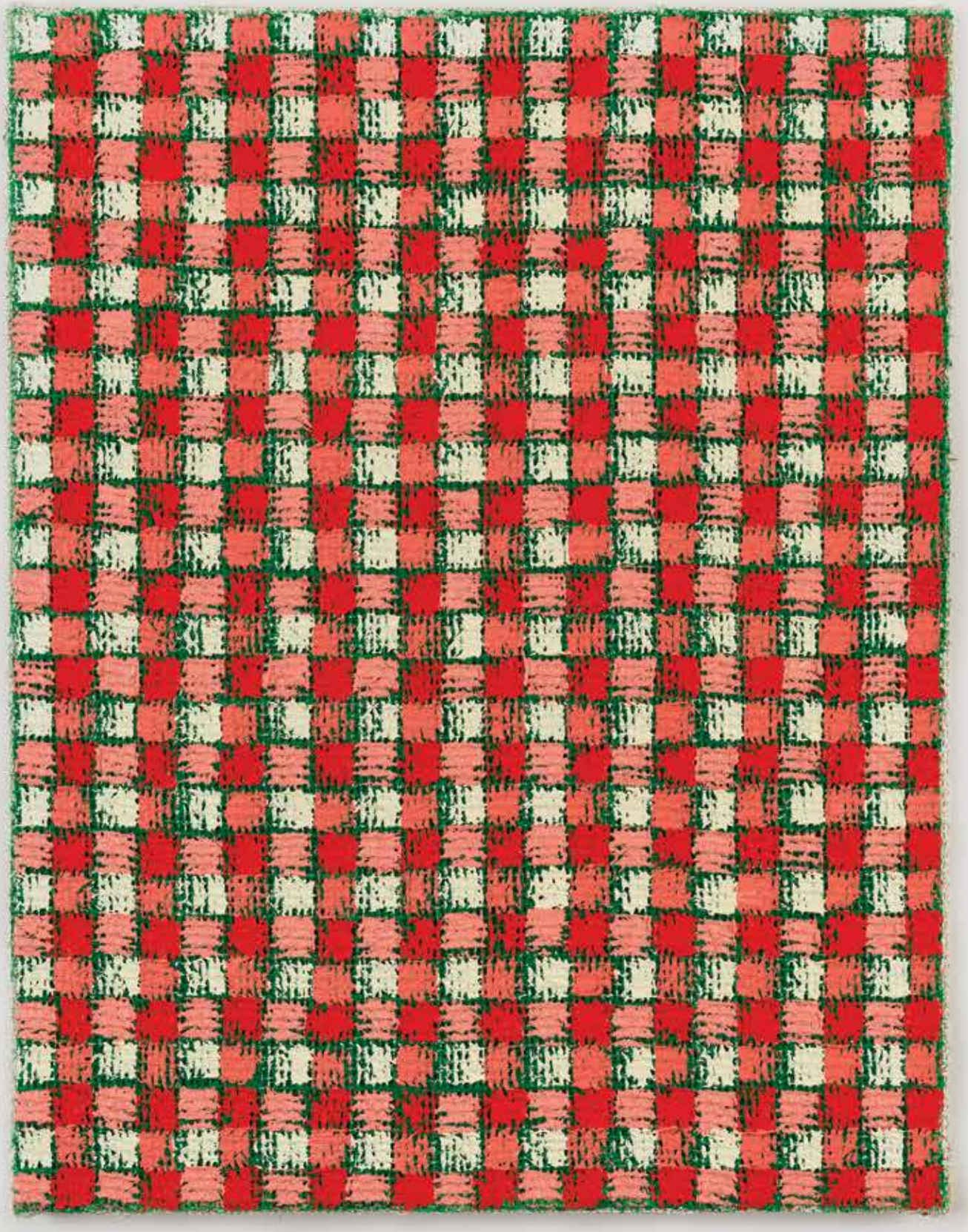
> **MG:** Like many late-career artists I recognized that I have developed a hardened set of patterns, routines, and attachments. Artmaking helps me rework and rethink these default postures, some of which have become pathological due to familiarity, laziness, and fear. Experimentation in artmaking allows me to work through my impulsive habits or at the very least, understand them. And you are correct to identify that my writing activity is another way to avoid narrow, unimaginative thinking. My friend, the Danish art critic Pernille Albrethse, said that "When it comes right down to it, late works are eyewitnesses from the edge, from the end of life. Many of them testify to the courage to dare to look at what scares us. We must somehow train ourselves to get better at going through changes without becoming paralysed, unable to act." This is the most important work I can do now. But before I could take it on, I had to ditch any values and beliefs in the conventional criteria that culture uses to measure artistic success and influence, which are all pretty flimsy and fleeting these days, so rethinking past ideas and past work is not terribly risky and wonderfully exciting.

PC: *As we are having this conversation, the United States is about to go through a major transition itself. Although we already had a rehearsal of sorts, by the time this is published, we will be on the other side and will likely have some idea of how the next four years might play out. Even so, the art market is already in a major downturn. Collectors are buying less art, galleries are closing, and no doubt funding*

for the arts will be in an even more precarious state than it already is. Add to that, artists are a subculture that contains within itself representations of a variety of other subcultures that are potentially at risk. How do we protect our community?

> **MG:** I find great optimism in something George Saunders wrote about fiction: "It causes an incremental change in the state of a mind.... That change is finite but real. And that is not nothing. It's not everything, but it's not nothing." Art does that too. So that means we keep working as artists and as compassionate citizens protecting our creative communities, our vulnerable populations, and our natural world.

PATRICK COLLIER is an artist and writer who lives in Corvallis, Oregon. He has exhibited throughout the state, including the Schneider Museum of Art at Southern Oregon University in Ashland. Other exhibitions of note include The Suburban at its original site in Oak Park, IL and the University of Illinois Springfield's Visual Arts Gallery. He has most recently written art criticism for *Oregon ArtsWatch* and is the author of numerous exhibition catalog essays.



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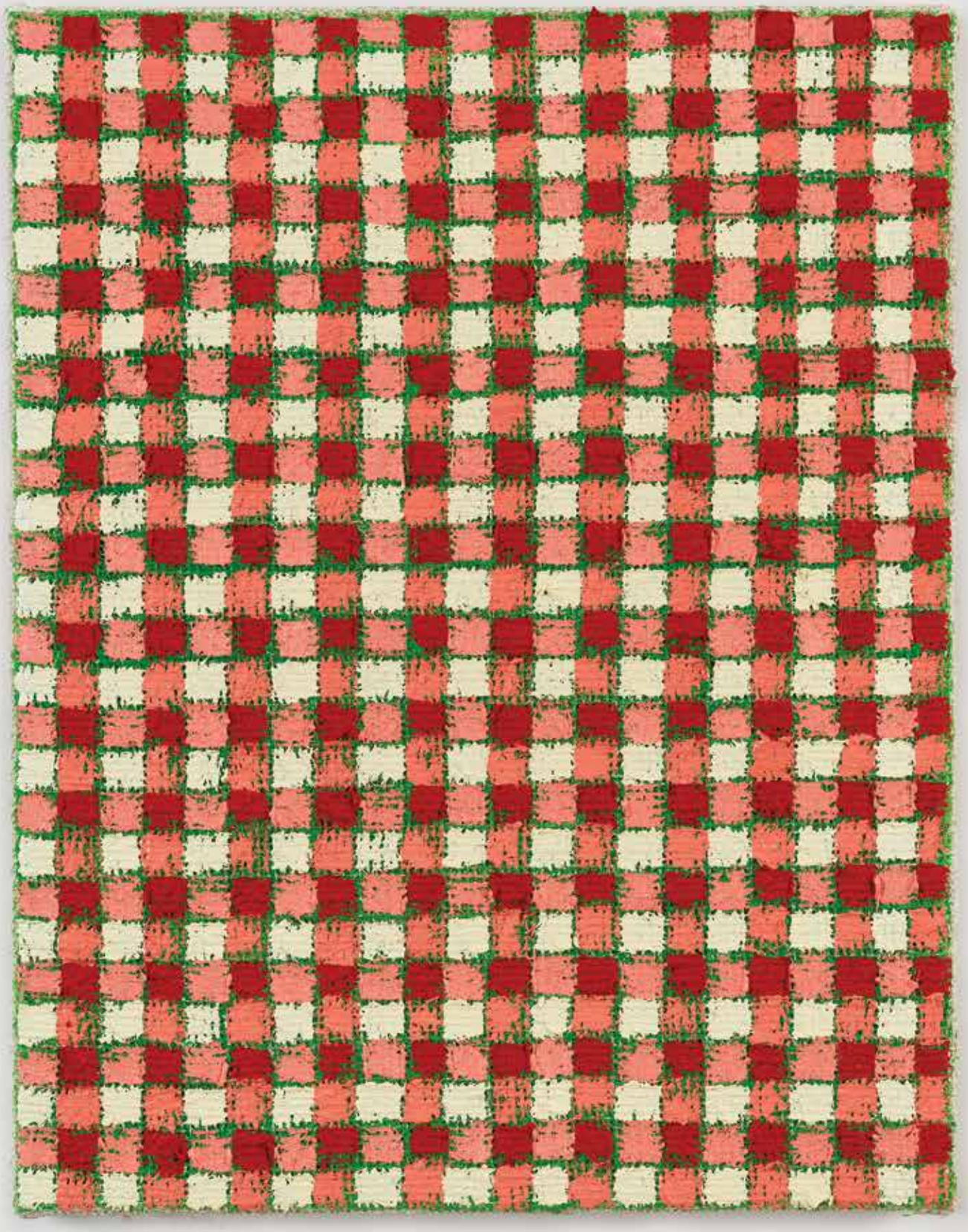
Cat. no. 13



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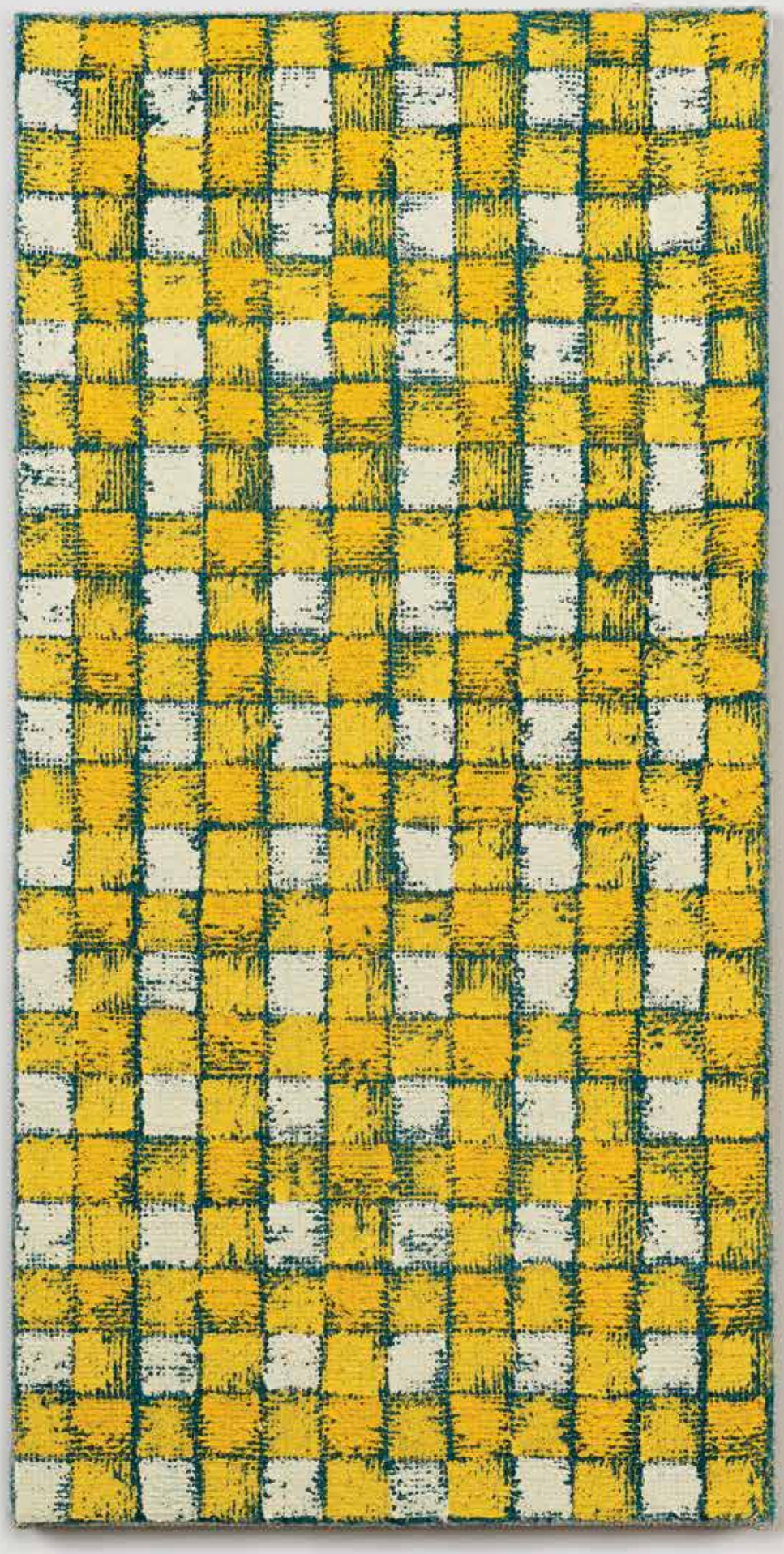
11 x 14 in.
Cat. no. 15



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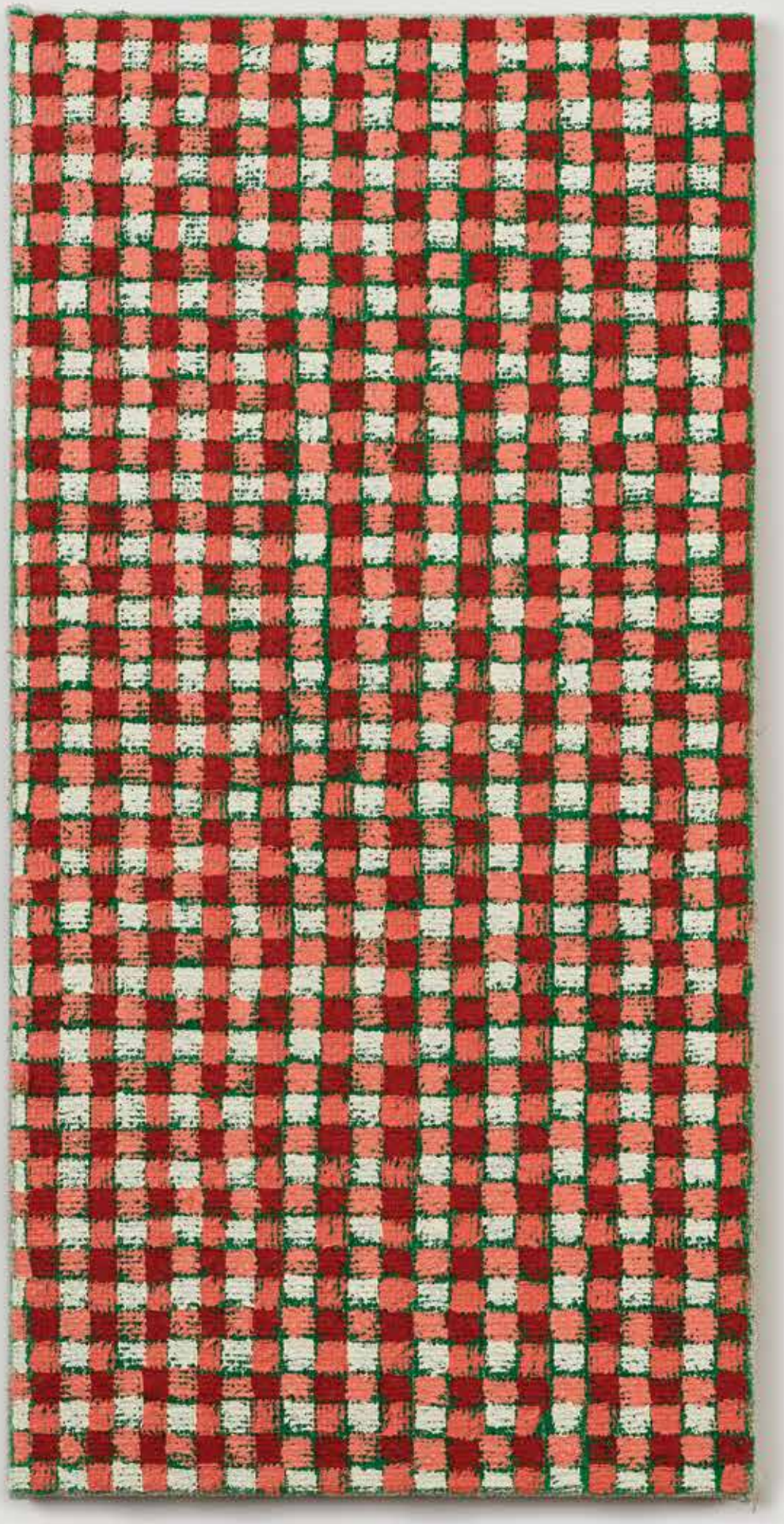
Cat. no. 16



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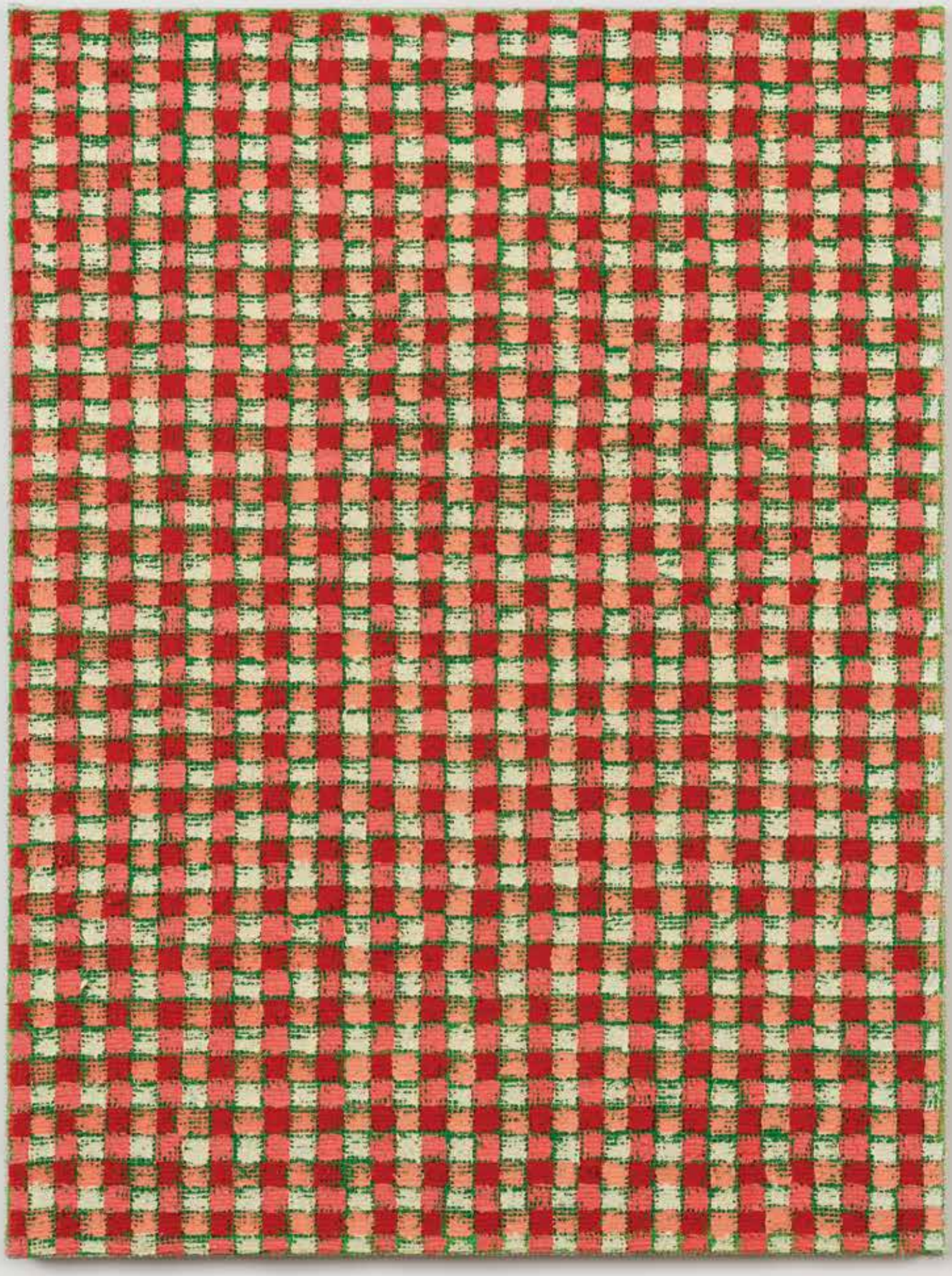

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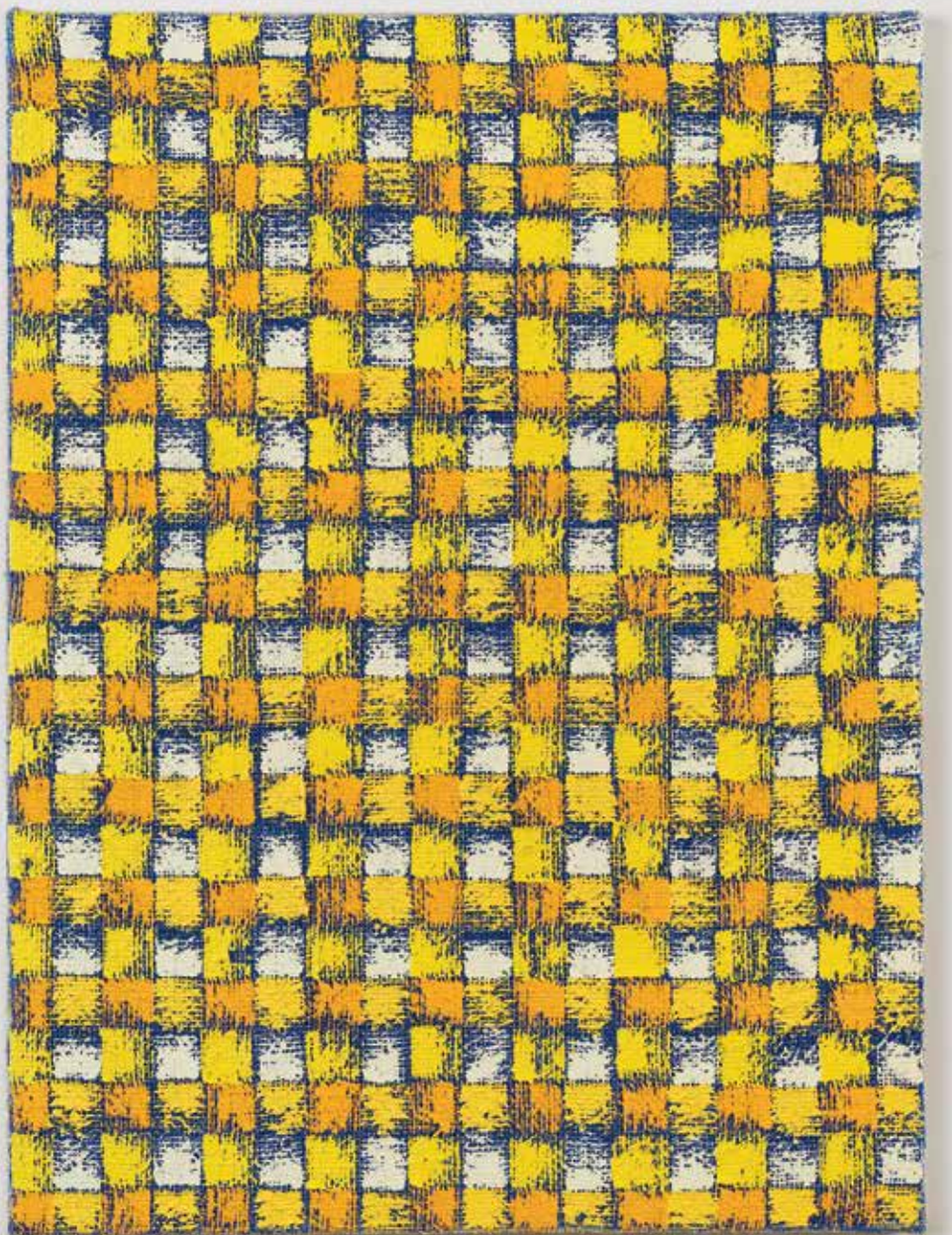

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Oil, acrylic on burlap
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Cat. no. 19
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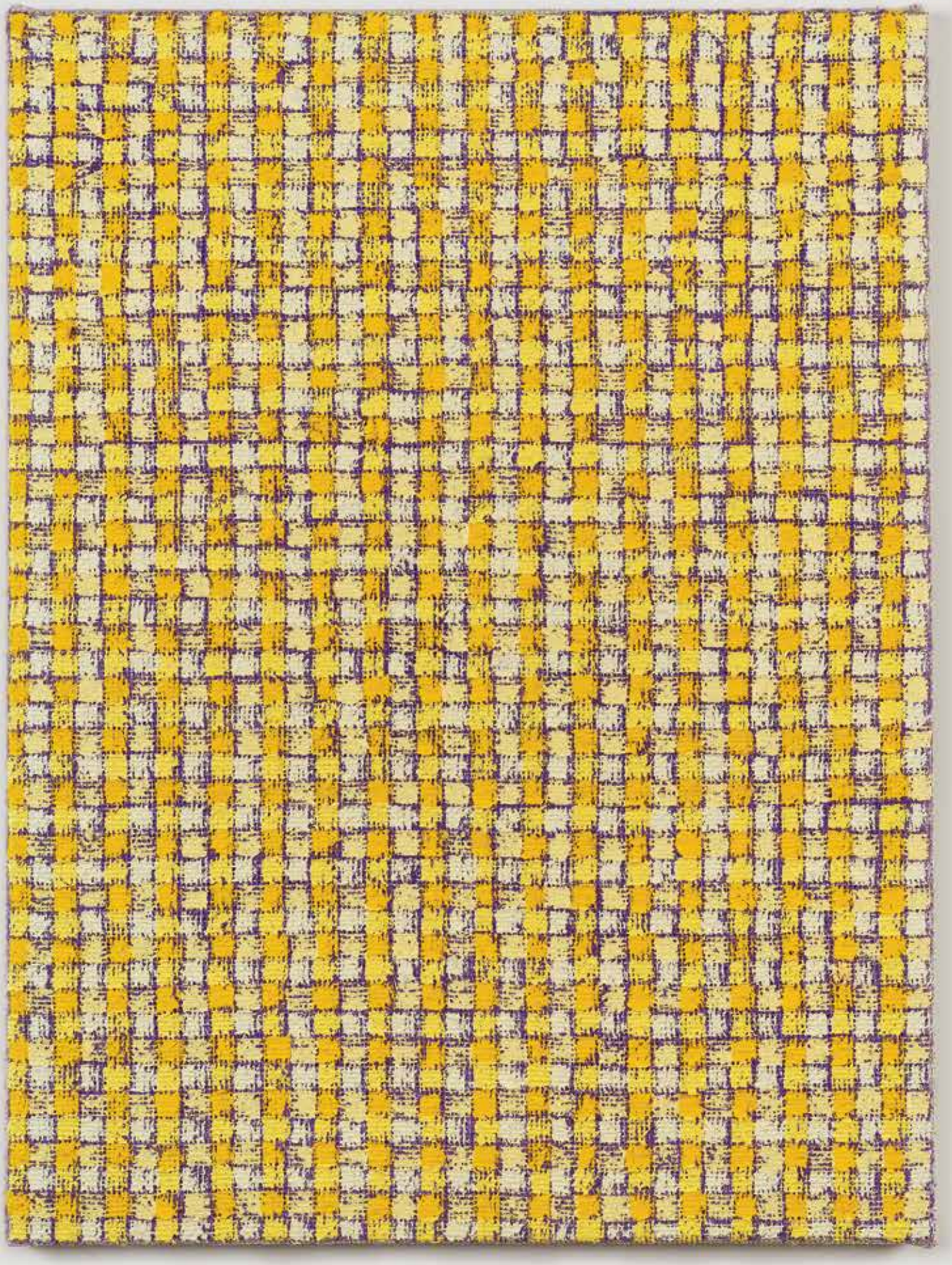

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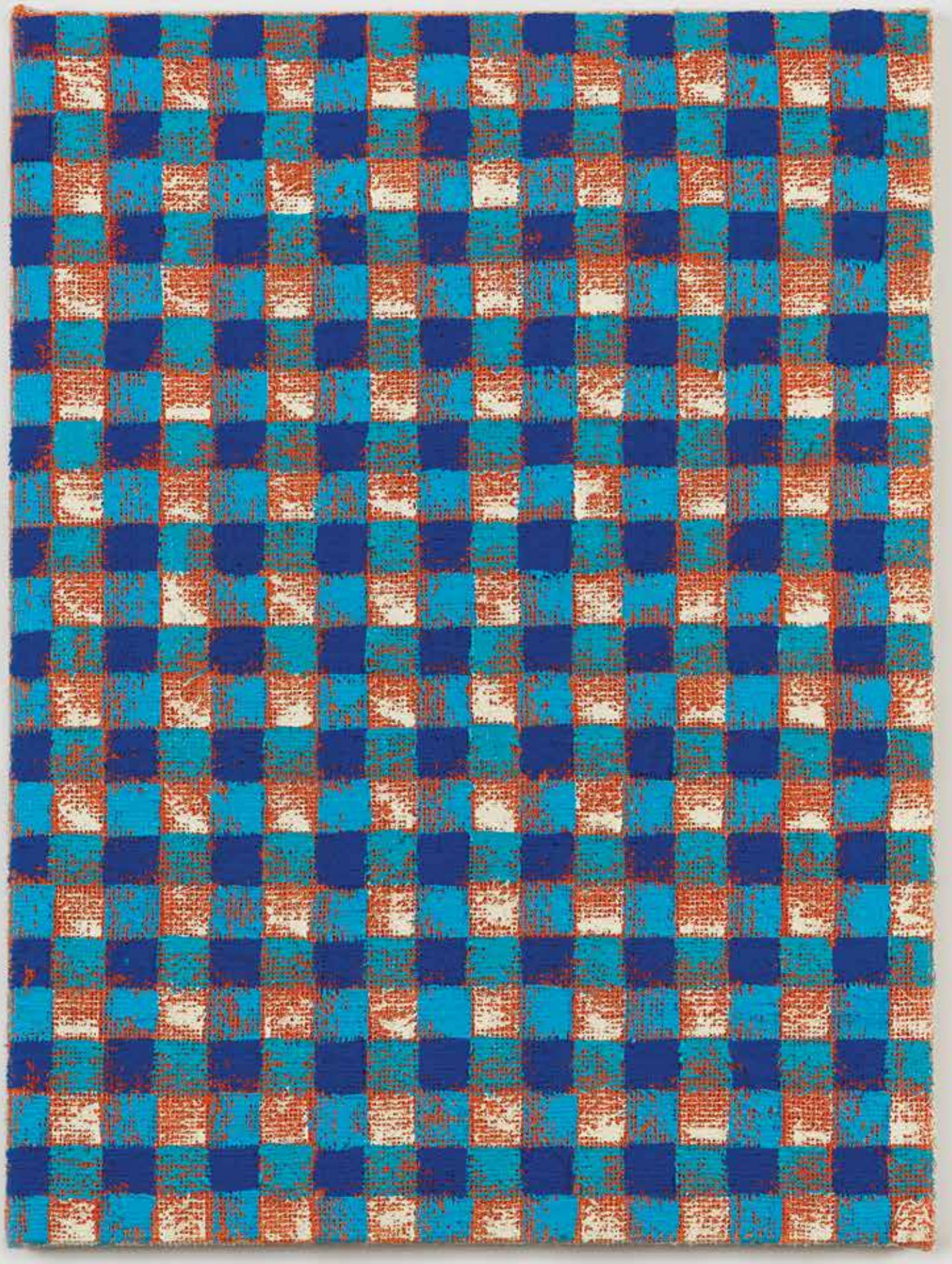

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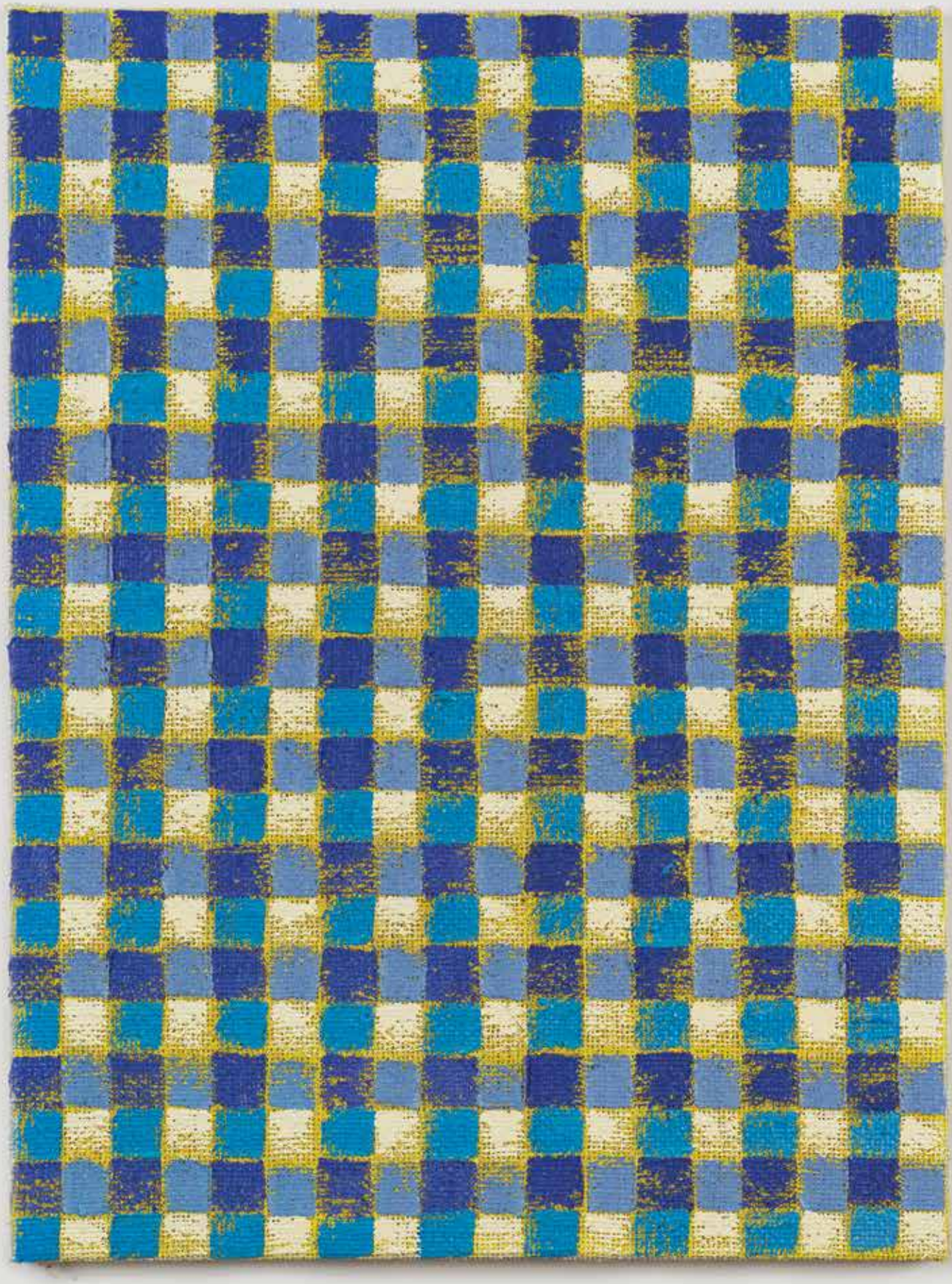

Untitled, 2019
Oil, acrylic on burlap
24 x 18 in.
Cat. no. 23

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

1. *Untitled*, 2019
Oil, acrylic on burlap
10 x 10 in.
(page 7)

2. *Untitled*, 2019
Oil, acrylic on burlap
10 x 10 in.
(page 4)

3. *Untitled*, 2019
Oil, acrylic on burlap
10 x 10 in.
(page 18)

4. *Untitled*, 2019
Oil, acrylic on burlap
10 x 10 in.
(not illustrated)

5. *Untitled*, 2019
Oil, acrylic on burlap
10 x 10 in.
(page 19)

6. *Untitled*, 2019
Oil, acrylic on burlap
10 x 10 in.
(page 22)

7. *Untitled*, 2019
Oil, acrylic on burlap
10 x 10 in.
(page 21)

8. *Untitled*, 2019
Oil, acrylic on burlap
10 x 10 in.
(page 21)

9. *Untitled*, 2019
Oil, acrylic on burlap
10 x 10 in.
(page 23)

10. *Untitled*, 2019
Oil, acrylic on burlap
10 x 10 in.
(page 23)

11. *Untitled*, 2019
Oil, acrylic on burlap
10 x 10 in.
(page 24)

12. *Untitled*, 2019
Oil, acrylic on burlap
14 x 11 in.
(page 20)

13. *Untitled*, 2019
Oil, acrylic on burlap
14 x 11 in.
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14. *Untitled*, 2019
Oil, acrylic on burlap
14 x 11 in.
(page 31)

15. *Untitled*, 2019
Oil, acrylic on burlap
14 x 11 in.
(page 32)

16. *Untitled*, 2019
Oil, acrylic on burlap
24 x 12 in.
(page 33)

17. *Untitled*, 2019
Oil, acrylic on burlap
24 x 12 in.
(page 34)

18. *Untitled*, 2019
Oil, acrylic on burlap
24 x 18 in.
(page 35)

19. *Untitled*, 2019
Oil, acrylic on burlap
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(page 36)

20. *Untitled*, 2019
Oil, acrylic on burlap
24 x 18 in.
(page 37)

21. *Untitled*, 2019
Oil, acrylic on burlap
24 x 18 in.
(not illustrated)

22. *Untitled*, 2019
Oil, acrylic on burlap
24 x 18 in.
(page 38)

23. *Untitled*, 2019
Oil, acrylic on burlap
24 x 18 in.
(page 39)

24. *Untitled*, 2020
Oil, enamel on linen
10 x 8 in.
(page 42 and 43)

25. *Untitled*, 2020
Oil, enamel on linen
14 x 11 in.
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26. *Untitled*, 2020
Oil, enamel on linen
14 x 11 in.
(page 44 and 45)

27. *Untitled*, 2020
Oil, enamel on linen
14 x 11 in.
(page 46)

28. *Untitled*, 2022
Walnut, bronze, jam jar lids
18 x 15 in.
(page 50)

29. *Untitled*, 2022
Walnut, bronze, jam jar lids
18 x 15 in.
(page 51)

30. *Untitled*, 2023
Wood, bronze, silver leaf, jam jar lids
61 x 16 x 2 in.
(page 52)

31. *Secco Fresco* (detail), 2024–25
Mineral paint on plaster
100 units, each 20 x 22 in. maximum
Overall dimensions variable
(page 47)

32. *Untitled*, 2024–25
Bronze
45 x 27 x 12 in.
(page 49)

33. *Untitled* (detail), 2024–25
Sand-cast bronze, oil paint
20 units, each 11 x 11 in. maximum
Overall dimensions variable
(page 48)

34. *Untitled*, 2024–25
Powder-coated steel
6 units, each 34 in. in length
Overall dimensions variable
(not illustrated)

35. *Untitled*, 2024–25
Slip-cast vitreous china
50 units, each 11 in. in diam.
Overall dimensions variable
(not illustrated)

36. *Untitled* (detail), 2024–25
Solid wood, oil paint
12 units, each 14 x 8 x 3 in.
Overall dimensions variable
(pages 8 and 9)

37. *Untitled*, 2024–25
Steel ham tins, silver leaf
23 units, each 4 x 10½ x 5½ in.
Overall dimensions variable
(page 25)

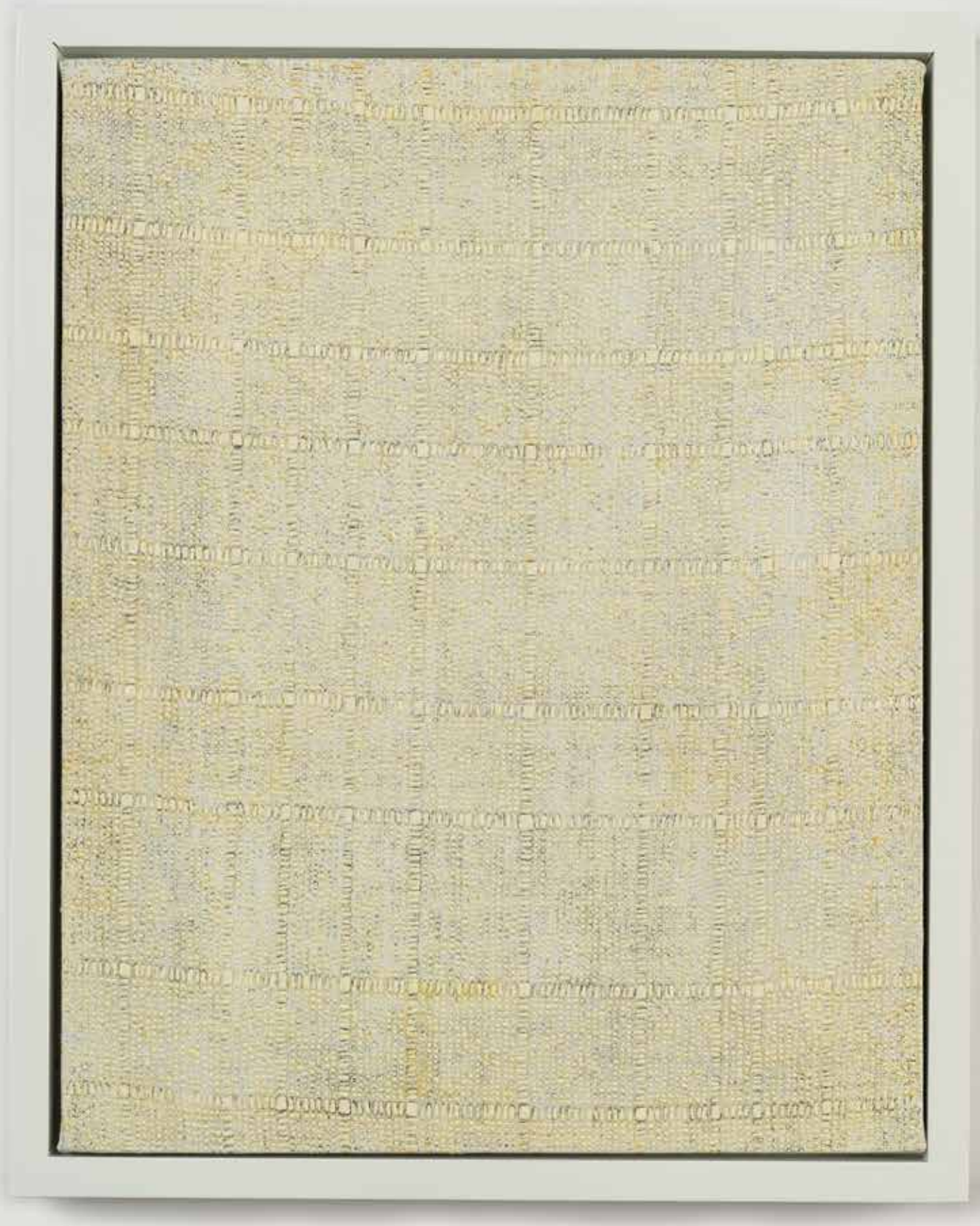
38. *Untitled*, 2024–25
Bronze
150 units, each approx. 3 in. in diam.
Overall dimensions variable
(not illustrated)

Height precedes width precedes depth.

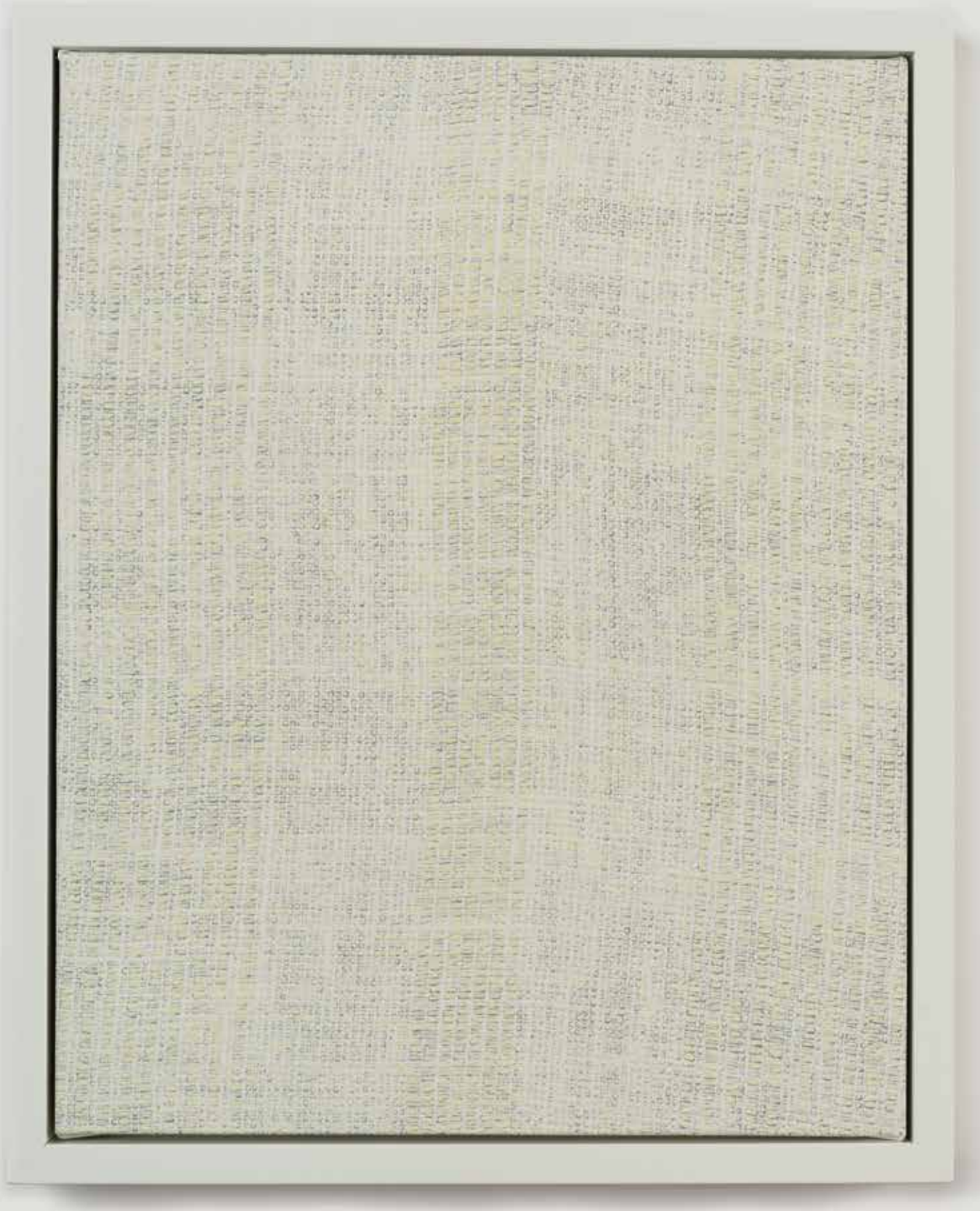
All works lent by the artist.

Untitled, 2020
Oil, enamel on linen
14 x 11 in.
Cat. no. 25

Untitled, 2020
Oil, enamel on linen
10 x 8 in.
Cat. no. 24
Opposite: detail



Untitled, 2020
Oil, enamel on linen
14 x 11 in.
Cat. no. 26
Opposite: detail



Untitled, 2020
Oil, enamel on linen
14 x 11 in.
Cat. no. 27

Secco Fresco (detail), 2024-25
Mineral paint on plaster
100 units, each 20 x 22 in. maximum
Overall dimensions variable
Cat. no. 31

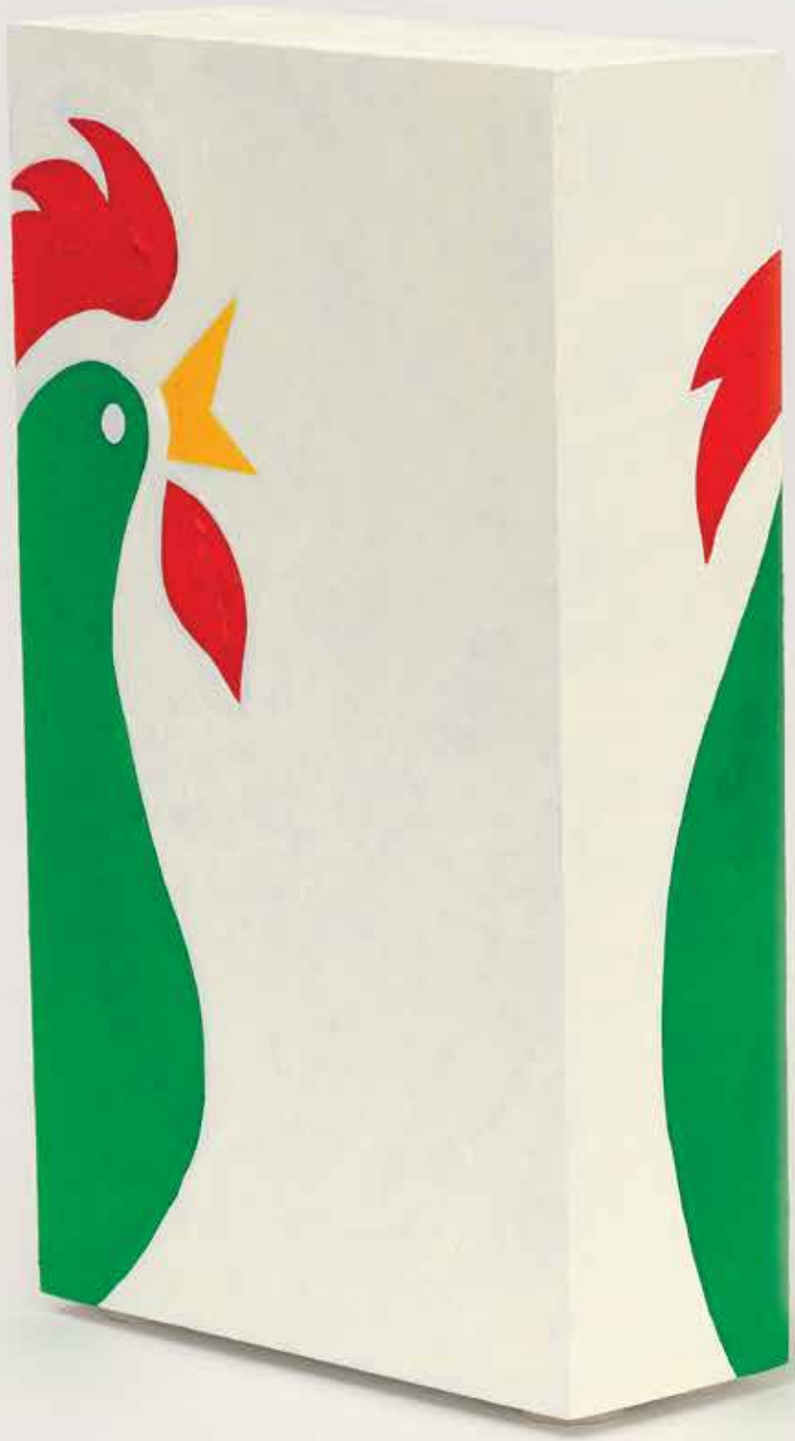
Untitled (detail), 2024-25
Sand-cast bronze, oil paint
20 units, each 11 x 11 in. maximum
Overall dimensions variable
Cat. no. 33

Untitled, 2024-25
Bronze
45 x 27 x 12 in.
Cat. no. 32

Untitled, 2022
Walnut, bronze, jam jar lids
18 x 15 in.
Cat. no. 28

Untitled, 2022
Walnut, bronze, jam jar lids
18 x 15 in.
Cat. no. 29

Untitled, 2023
Wood, bronze, silver leaf, jam jar lids
61 x 16 x 2 in.
Cat. no. 30
Above: detail



Underdone Potato: Michelle Grabner

APRIL 17 – AUGUST 9, 2025

SCHNEIDER MUSEUM of ART